

throughout. He uses compound and irregular meters frequently, alternating broad lyric phrases with a kind of lyric recitative. His music is musically challenging, yet aurally accessible, and quite simply, gorgeous. In “Prologue,” the first song, the texture is sparse and the piano woven expertly in with the vocal line, sitting comfortably in the lyric baritone tessitura. “Satan Speaks” is declamatory and furious, with no great leaps melodically, relying instead on a narrow range of pitches in a percussive vocal line. “Victory” recounts a catalogue of heroes and heroines, from Roland and Cuchulain to Helen and Iseult, finally arriving at the mythical phoenix. The music is marked *deciso* and *doloroso*, and is a kind of heroic lay. “Night,” marked *semplice* and *cantabile*, is an intimate faerie incantation, culminating with an extended passionate outburst on a high F, “Ah, leave the world and come away!” “Alexandrines” is a text setting of poetic meters, *alexandrines*, which Boyle uses to create a *parlando*, *con minaccia* (threat) quasi-religious confession. He uses extreme dynamic contrasts to great and disturbing effect, and by the end of the song, we do not know whether it is a deity or demon in the line, “yet, thither doom will drive me and He will win at last.” “Spooks” begins as a lyric love song, but by the end, the lover is revealed to be a ghost, and Boyle creates an uneasy atmosphere with expressive and beautiful long lines. Although the final song, “World’s Desire,” is an energetic *allegretto*, Boyle’s choice of text is still infused with an otherworldly, anxious thread, but still *cantabile*, *espressivo* and beautiful.

Abel, Mark (b. 1948.) *The Ocean of Forgiveness: Five Poems of Joanne*

Regenhardt, for mezzo soprano or soprano, and piano. Classical Vocal Reprints/Oceangoing Music (ASCAP), 2017.

1. “Desert Wind,” 2. “Sally’s Suicide,”
3. “In Love With the Sky,” 4. “Reunion,”
5. “Patience.” (Duration: 18 minutes)

Abel’s work has been reviewed earlier in this column, most recently *The Palm Trees are Restless* (September/October 2016). Here, he has chosen to set the poems of another Southern California poet, Joanne Regenhardt, a former opera singer who resides in La Jolla. Abel is often drawn to site-specific texts; in Kate Gale’s poetry in *The Palm Trees*, Los Angeles is the setting. Here in *The Ocean of Forgiveness*, at least in the first and third songs, Abel has chosen texts describing the austere and beautiful Anza-Borrego State Park, situated east of San Diego. In the opening, “Desert Wind,” we are immediately immersed in the composer’s signature style, free flowing and improvisatory, and tinged with jazz and pop/rock elements. “Sally’s Suicide” is a more subdued setting of a heartbreaking “depiction of a friend undone by life’s cruel strokes.” The metaphoric sea anemone of the poem, anchored but vulnerable, is buffeted by the sea, which Abel has effectively drawn with a static piano part that quickly morphs into a moving line, ornamented by trills and appoggiaturas. “In Love with the Sky” is a cheerful paean to the firmament above, with the pianistic writing changing early on from sustained to busy melismatic lines, and the voice moving nimbly with the triplet figures in the middle of the song, and then arching over the busy sixteenths that dominate the rest of the song. As the emotion increases in intensity, the vocal line rises and remains in and above the *passaggio*,

and tempo changes are frequent and marked. “Reunion” and “Patience” are both romantic poem settings, beautiful and fitting capstones to the cycle. “Patience” includes a piano solo that leads into the climactic arc of the text, “until together we will love the world.” In all the songs of this set, Abel writes for the voice gracefully and gratefully, even when there are large leaps up above the staff at times of emotional duress in the text. All of the songs in this set are dramatically and technically demanding, that, while often remaining in a middle voice tessitura, require the agility and expansive range of a *schwiffenfach* voice. [See also Berg’s “Listener’s Gallery” review (111–112).]

Cloud, Judith (b. 1954.) *Botany for the Gods: Six Songs to Poems by Janet Joyner, for coloratura soprano and piano*. Classical Vocal Reprints/Cloud Walk Press, 2016. 1. “Cassandra,” 2. “Rain Song: Homage to Paul Verlaine,” 3. “Botany for the Gods,” 4. “Decoherence as My Way Out of the Quantum Mechanics of Underpants,” 5. “In a Goolagong Bog,” 6. “Lift Off.” (Duration: 12’08”)

Judith Cloud brings her own rich experience as a singer, conductor, and voice teacher to a song catalogue described as “expressive and beautifully crafted for the voice” (Dr. Carol Kimball, composer website, www.judithcloud.com). Cloud has placed previously in the NATS Art Song competition, in 2010 with *Four Sonnets by Pablo Neruda, set 2*, and in 2012 with “I Spill My Soul.” Cloud’s past choices of poets for her many songs have included Margaret Atwood, Pablo Neruda, Ronsard, Yeats and e.e. cummings. The poems for *Botany* are the