April 11, 1984 at 8:15 p.m. in Greenwall Music Workshop

The Bennington College Music Division presents

An Evening of Song

by the students of

Frank Baker

premiering

VERMONT VIGNETTES

music and text by Louis Calabro

I. Lumberjack sung by Jill Beckwith
II. His Beard... Michael Downs
III. Epitaph Amy Hart
IV. Maple Syrup Susannah Waters
and Jane Harvey
V. Ira Jane Harvey
VI. A Rare Beauty Audrey Braam
VII. Exodus Susannah Waters
VIII. The Hunter Michael Downs
IX. Love Story Jill Beckwith
X. Town Meeting Michael Downs
XI. Jesamine Lisa Friede
XII. Dowsing Jill Beckwith
XIII. Verse Susannah Waters
XIV. Fly Casting Audrey Braam
XV. Holly Holland Michael Downs
XVI. A Brief Life Audrey Braam
XVII. Frugality Jill Beckwith

Accompanied by: Marianne Finckel
Muriel Palmer
Allejandro Sanchez-Navarro
Eric Zinman
and Louis Calabro

Other Vermont Vignettes are exhibited, in the form of photographs
by Neil Rappaport, from his series of portraits of the residents
of Pawlet Vermont. The exhibit was curated by Susan Alancraig.

Cartoons are by Kelcey Jacobsen.

Special thanks to Frank Baker, who took his students, the songs,
dedication and energy to Portugal this past winter to learn this
song cycle.
VERMONT VIGNETTES

...a note from the composer

In the bleak winter of 1983, after completing my Missa Brevis (the text in Latin), I longed for a return to my native tongue. I decided to brave the below zero weather and left my studio in Jennings and headed for the library, where I planned to spend a few hours browsing with the masters of English prose and poesy.

Lo!...as luck would have it, the library was closed. And so I headed back to Jennings filled with despair when mid-way, just beyond the pond, the wind picked up. I tried to calculate the Wind Chill Factor, but my mind went aboggle. My steps slowed to almost a halt as my body leaned horizontal, trying for headway. The wind blew away the remaining light and there I remained in icy darkness, cursing my twenty-eighth Vermont winter. What a way to die, I thought, just for a song! But somehow, I survived. And when I collapsed on my studio couch, I went into a deep slumber...I dreamt of lumber...slumber...lumber...Eureka! That was it! I ran for the typewriter and ripped out a long overdue counselee report (that I had been considering for some time) and put in some fresh paper and started writing.

"He slumbered in the lumber yard"....what a line! I was overjoyed. And yet I knew the hard part was yet to come. I ran to the piano and in a wink the line was set. Easier than I thought. But still, how much easier words flow...add an s to lumber, for slumber...add an s to get a slice from lice. Music, I thought, is the only hard art.

And so it went... sometimes a tune would pop into my head and I'd search for words, but usually it was the other way 'round. The trips between the typewriter and the piano, while numerous, were less hazardous than between Jennings and the library.

On the cast of characters, or a few of them: Mr. Winfield Bentley lived on our road and actually dowsed our land and found water. The well is still working.
--Frank Hollister from Chapel Road, a friend for many years, told me of a shooting accident he had while hunting. I made up the rest of it.
--Ira Barnicle could easily have been me, had I not been born in Brooklyn. I certainly turned out Ironical!
--Ma Agatha sounds fictitious, doesn't she?
--Jesamine was the Peggy Lee of the Green Mountains. She was actually kicked in the head by a horse, but I thought a mule was more poetic.
--Mr. Bump's story can be found in almost any Vermont cemetery. They didn't all play the fife, however.
--I composed Holly Holland and Frugality with the assumption that both Holly and Michael Hooker (the only two out-of-staters in the cycle) have senses of humor. If not, I'd better watch out!

- Louis Calabro
1984
I. Lumberjack

He slumbered in the lumber yard
Unaware that the buzz-saw was about
To interrupt his little snooze
(Too much booze, alas, too much)

And had he had, perhaps,
One less brew,
He might now be one
Instead of two.

II. His Beard...

His beard all agrizzle
His head all afrizzle
He tippled to the barn.

His nose all atrumble
His toes all abrumble
He stumbled to the barn.

His mind all aboggle
His hind all atoggle
He hobbled to the barn.

He tried, he did, to milk the cow,
Instead he milked the sow.

III. Epitaph

Deep was his sorrow
Deep his regret
When dear Tess left him
For a cigarette.

"Come back," he implored
But he she ignored
For the drag on a butt
You can bet.
IV. Maple Syrup

In March of Eighteen sixty-nine
Old Ebenezer Money
(His name rhymes with sunny)
went into the sugar bush.
With pail and spigot,
hammer and bit,
He drilled one nice hole
The juice flowed fine.

"Ayup," he said. (To no one in particular.)
"Like mother's milk," smooth
As gin.
He stuck his finger in the spout,
Alas, he couldn't get it out agin.

He stands there yet, old Ebenezer Money,
(His name rhymes with sunny)
Cold as stone,
but sweet as honey.

V.

Ira Barnicle
wore a monocle
On his way to the cider press.
Trailed by his pigs
His chickens and geese
They all sang together
Canonical.

But his story is not comical
(Some even say it's diabolical)
For in just one hour
The mash turned sour.
Went to his head
With so much power
That he...
Anyhow...
He came out of the press
Ironical.
VI. A Rare Beauty

She was born somewhere
Deep in the Green Mountains
And at eighteen no sweeter
Lass could be found.

She was raised on pure air
And when her golden hair, abounded
With trusses fair...
Her eyes...
Her lips...
But I can't go on
This tale is too sad
Believe me, gentle listener.
You'll be only too glad.

VII. Exodus

Mr. Bump left Vermont
Just one day in his life.
(He played the flute, the plow, the fife.)
He never should have left, you see
Instead he should have played high C.

Well anyway, he took this trip
He packed his one and only grip.

When on the road, he became laconic
And drove moronic (on the Taconic)
He should have left his car at home
And gone aboard a super-sonic.

Now all alone, at night, his wife
Plays sad songs upon his fife.

She does miss Mister Bump
She does miss, miss the bum.

VIII. The Hunter

He was a hunter, sure of shot
Rejoicing whenever a deer, he got
He'd skin it neat
Eat all the meat
And throw the bones to his fine dog, Spot.

One day, alas, he arose from bed
Early at dawn, in the woods to tread.
He sniffed the air
So fresh and fair.
Then someone shot him
Through the head.
IX. Love Story

She hates him she loves him she hates him she loves him
She hates him she loves him she do
She hates him she hates him she loves him she loves him
she hates him so toodle-loo.

She loves the way he greets her
She hates the way he treats her
She hates the things he makes her do.

She hates him she loves him she hates him she loves him
She hates him she loves him she do
She hates him she hates him she loves him she loves him
she hates him so toodle-loo.

She loves the way he flies a kite
She hates the way he smells at night
She hates the things he makes her do.

She loves the way he tills the soil
She hates the way he makes her toil
She loves the way he kills the sow
She hates the way he licks her brow
She hates the things he makes her do.

She loves him she loves him she loves him she loves him
She loves she loves him she do
She hates him she hates him she hates him she hates him
she hates him so toodle-loo.

She loves the way he milks the goat
She hates the way he licks her throat
She hates the things he makes her do.

X. Town Meeting

It snowed thirty feet or more that year
(Even the wood-chucks were rare)
No one showed on Town Meeting day
Except Ma Agatha, who smelled of hay.
(Her boots were on, but her head was bare)

She chaired the empty hall
(By jiminy she had a ball)
And when the snow had finally thawed
They found her bones
Laid on the floor.
XI. Jesamine

Jes' when she thought
Things were jes' fine
Old Jesamine got kicked in the head
by a mule.
Jes' for an instant
It reminded her of another time
When she got jilted
by a fool.
But now her reminding days are over,
As she lies still
Deep in the clover.

XII. Dowsing

Old man Bentley, bent with age
Dowsed around, amidst the sage.
He was a mystic of high order
And found, for sure, all kinds of water.

This story is quite hard to tell
because, you see, he tripped and fell
into his new dug well.

His dowsing rod has gone to root
turning, somehow, into a lute...
Playing, softly, fare-thee-well.

XIII. Verse

What could be worse
Than verse that's terse?
A one-armed nurse?
No.
An evil-eyed curse?
No.
A half-empty purse?
No.
Not to tease any longer
I'll tell you what's worse than verse that's terse;
A stiff Vermonter in
an air-conditioned hearse.
Yes!
XIV. Fly Casting

On the first day of fishing season
(No need here for rhyme or reason)
Ol' Jethro Hatch, maligned with gout
Went out to catch some trout.

He waited long, oh, how he sighed:
For just this moment, to cast his fly.
He trudged to the winding Batten Kill
For sure, he thought, he'd get his fill.

With his good leg in the water
His bad leg out (remember gout?)
He heard a shout from his only daughter,
"Oh Daddy, Behind you! Watch out!"

XV. Holly Holland

Holly Holland came from Maine
To get away from the harsh terrain
Too many blueberries
Too much pine
The rocks and rain became a pain.

So a train from Maine she took
With her favorite hen and her favorite book
For Vermont she sped
And there she wed
A man with a forelorn look.

They bought some land on West Mountain Road
where nothing survives not even a toad
'though her hen laid eggs
Holly Holland ate its legs
While her husband ate pie-a-la-mode.
XVI. A Brief Life

She was young
She was fair
And was among
The flowers rare
(But no one cared)
Her heart was pure
Her beauty sure
and when she sang
All heaven rang
(Still, no one cared)
And then one day
It was in May
She wept and sighed
Lay down and died
(Her soul was spared.)

XVII. Frugality

There came a man named Michael Hooker
Who wasn't much of a macho looker.

He wanted to be president
So's he could set some precedent.

He liked Vermont (or so he said)
and settled in a Shaftsbury bed.

And the first thing he did, by blazes
Was to strip us of our raises.

He did it (he said) against his will
And now Vermont is poorer still.

But our story ends with a ray of hope
(because, you see, he was no dope)

Like the scant-clad feathered Sally Rand
He fluttered back to Maryland.

1983
Bennington, Vermont