

Program Note

The Frozen Lake was composed in the Fall of 1995 on a commission from L'Ensemble that requested a setting of poems by Robert Frost for soprano, violin and piano. I chose six poems that seemed to me to be linked by themes of loneliness, alienation, and the desire to break out, to "get some color and music out of life" – in words of the fourth poem, The Investment. The title, which was meant to suggest these themes, comes from the most familiar poem in the group, Stopping by Woods.

Looking through Frost's work one is hard pressed to find support for his reputation as a cozily avuncular figure. The poems set in this piece suggest a kind of American Samuel Beckett, or a poetic counterpart to the paintings of Edward Hopper. At no point in these texts does human contact occur; the protagonists are isolated in their private worlds, often "In the dark" in every sense. The narrator of "Stopping by..." thinks he knows who the owner of the woods is, but in any case the owner's house is in the village; the digger of potatoes in "The Investment" can only speculate who is playing the distant piano, and the text only says that the piano is playing, not that a person is playing it.

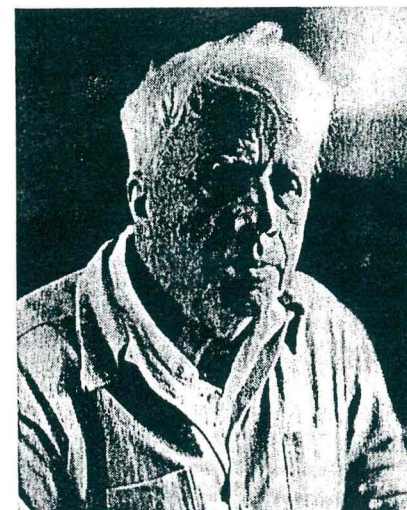
The violin, which enters midway in the second song, Bereft, provides an independent commentary in three of the songs. Absent in movements 1 and 5, it plays solo with the voice in movement 7, Canis Major, suggesting a phantom partner in the sky. Writing this piece I pictured that the speaker in the poem was out on his porch at night, happily drunk. Movements 3 and 6 are rhapsodic interludes in which the violin and piano seem to go off on their own freely improvising on themes from the songs.

This work is dedicated to Ida Faiella and Barry Finclair.

Allen Shawn

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**BENNINGTON COLLEGE PRESENTS...**



# The Frozen Lake

music by Allen Shawn      poetry by Robert Frost

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1996  
8:00 P.M.  
DEANE CARRIAGE BARN**



Introductory remarks by  
President Elizabeth Coleman

I

"The Sweetest Dream that Labor Knows"

*The Pasture*  
*Mending Wall*  
*Fire and Ice*  
*Come In*

Steven Cramer, *Poet*  
Robert J. Lurtsema, *Reader*

- interval -

II

Poetry of Robert Frost

Robert J. Lurtsema, *Reader*

III

The Frozen Lake

music by Allen Shawn poetry by Robert Frost

Commissioned by L'Ensemble, 1995

*Desert Places*  
*Bereft*  
*Interlude*  
*Acceptance*  
*The Investment*  
*Interlude*  
*Canis Major*

*Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*

Ida Faiella, *Soprano*  
Barry Finclair, *Violin*  
Allen Shawn, *Piano*

ALLEN SHAWN, *Composer/Pianist* (born 1948) grew up in New York City and began composing at the age of ten. As a child he studied the piano with Francis Dillon and Emilie Harris at Mannes College of Music. He received his B.A. from Harvard University in 1970, spent two years in Paris studying composition with Nadia Boulanger and then returned to New York to continue studies at Columbia University, from which he received his M.A. in music in 1976. In addition to Boulanger, his principal composition teachers were Leon Kirchner, Earl Kim and Jack Beeson. Up until 1985 he continued living in New York and held a variety of jobs including teaching at the Mannes College repertory Department (1973-79) and the Elizabeth Seeger School (1972-80) and working as a pianist in pit orchestras on Broadway and at the New York Shakespeare Festival. Since 1985 he and his family have lived in Vermont and he has been on the faculty of Bennington College, where he teaches composition.

Although the bulk of Shawn's output in chamber music, he has also composed five orchestral works, two operas to libretti by his brother actor Wallace Shawn, much incidental music for theater (including scores for the New York Shakespeare Festival, the La Jolla Playhouse and Lincoln Center Theater), and music for the film "My Dinner With Andre", as well as works for voice and chorus. Commissions have come from the Atlanta Ballet Company, the Lucinda Childs Ballet Company, the Greenwich Symphony, the Sage City Symphony, the Aspen Wind Quintet, clarinetist Benny Goodman, the Norell-Siebert-Lucarelli Trio, the Bennington County Choral Society, North Adams State College and many other organizations and ensembles. In the past year, Shawn's music has been featured on WNYC radio in New York (on the program "Around New York") and WGBH in Boston (on Morning Pro Musica). Three current CD's contain works by Shawn. The Wind Quintet is recorded by the Aspen Wind Quintet on Bay Cities; the Suite for Cello Quartet is performed by the Bennington Cello Quartet on Opus One; and three works, the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Winter Sketchbook for Violin and Piano and Eclogue for two Pianos are performed on an additional CD on the Opus One Label. In preparation, is a CD featuring the Sextet for Piano and Wind Quintet played by Ursula Oppens and the Aspen Wind Quintet for the NorthEastern Label.

Recent awards include a First Prize in the Carnegie Chamber Players Composition contest for his Piano Trio (1993), First Prize in the Ithaca Choral Competition for "in time of daffodils" (1990) to a text by e.e. cummings, and the 1995 Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Shawn's music is published by Galaxy Music and Gunmar Music.

As a pianist, Allen Shawn primarily performs twentieth century music. He appeared as soloist with the Vermont Symphony in 1988 in a performance of his Nocturnes for piano and chamber orchestra. In 1991, he was piano soloist with the Sage City Symphony in Mozart's Concerto in E-flat, K. 449.

STEVEN CRAMER, *Poet* is the author of three collections of poetry, *The Eye That Desires to Look Upward*, (The Galileo Press, 1987), *The World Book* (Copper Beech, 1992) and *Dialogue for the Left and Right Hand* (Lumen Editions, 1997). His poems and criticism have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harvard Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, *Triquarterly* and numerous other periodicals. He has held editorial positions at David R. Godine, Publisher and *The Atlantic Monthly*, and has taught writing at Boston University, M.I.T., and Tufts University. He currently teaches literature at Bennington College. His awards include grants from the Artists Foundation of Massachusetts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Alan Collins fellowship to the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference.



## - about the artists -

**IDA FAIELLA, *Soprano***, is Founder and Executive Artistic Director of L'Ensemble. Donal Henahan of The New York Times has described her as possessing "... a clear soprano voice ..." and as one who sings "... with considerable intelligence and an apt intimacy and warmth." Committed to contemporary vocal chamber music, Ms. Faiella has sung many first performances of works by American composers including Victoria Bond, Seymour Barab, Arnold Black, George Calusdian, Gloria Colicchio, Jon Deak, Joseph Fennimore and Richard Winslow, many of which were composed especially for her. She continues this work with the newly commissioned piece by composer Allen Shawn being performed on this concert.

Ida Faiella's research into the music of women composers has resulted in several residencies, and lecture-performances at such places as the University of Minnesota, the University of Maine, Skidmore, Williams and Eastern Mennonite College. As Music Director of the Friendship Ambassadors, the largest, private cultural exchange foundation in the United States, Ms. Faiella has produced festivals and concert tours with the ministries of music in Romania, Poland, Russia, and India. Her latest recording for ZBS and National Public Radio, The Maltese Goddess, won the Prix Italia over entries from 25 countries.

Winner of the Jenny Lind Competition, Ida Faiella has studied with Jennie Tourel, Adele Addison and Dan Merriman, and holds degrees from the Hartt College of Music and SUNY Stonybrook with additional studies at the Aspen Music Festival School, Fairfield University and Yale University. Ms. Faiella was chair of the Albany Arts Commission for two years and is a member of the music faculty at Bennington College.

**BARRY FINCLAIR, *Violin***, has been a member of L'Ensemble since 1973. A native New Yorker, he attended New York City's School of Performing Arts, Juilliard School of Music, Mannes College of Music and the University of Southern California.

A former member of the New York Philharmonic, Mr. Finclair studied with Dorothy DeLay, Itzhak Perlman, Ivan Galamian, Jascha Heifetz, William Kroll and David Nadien. At age 13 he was selected by Leonard Bernstein as soloist on the nationally televised New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts. His awards and prizes include first place in the Merriweather Post Competition. He has appeared as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C.

Wrote the New York Times: "It was the wicked virtuosity with which Barry Finclair handled the violin solos that seemed responsible for the intensity of the performance."

**ROBERT J. LURTSEMA, *Reader***, has, since 1971, been host and executive producer of public radio's most popular music show *Morning Pro Musica*, produced in Boston and heard locally on WAMC-FM.

Mr. Lurtsema was born in Cambridge, MA and studied drama, radio and television, and journalism at Boston University. In 1975, he began studying musical composition and theory at the New England Conservatory of Music. He has written a film score and chamber pieces. This includes a bassoon quartet which was adapted for Julia Child's television series on PBS. With many years of theatrical experience as an actor and director, Mr. Lurtsema has become very much in demand as a lecturer and narrator. Numerous contemporary composers have written pieces specifically for his multi-voiced narration.

## - the text -

### Desert Places

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the Ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
But a few weed and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it-it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less-  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars-on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

### Bereft

Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?  
What would it take my standing there for,  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?  
Summer was past and day was past.  
Somber clouds in the west were massed,  
Out in the porch's sagging floor,  
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abraod,  
Word I was in my life alone,  
Word I had no one left but God.

## Acceptance

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud  
And goes down burning into the gulf below,  
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud  
At what has happened. Birds, at least, must know  
It is the change to darkness in the sky.  
Murmuring something quiet in her breast,  
One bird begins to close a faded eye;  
Or overtaken too far from his nest,  
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif  
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.  
At most he thinks or twitters softly, 'Safe!  
Now let the night be dark for all of me.  
Let the night be too dark for me to see  
Into the future. Let what will be, be.'

## The Investment

Over back where they speak of life as staying  
(‘You couldn’t call it living, for it ain’t’),  
There was an old, old house renewed with paint,  
And in it a piano loudly playing.

Out in the plowed ground in the cold a digger,  
Among unearthed potatoes standing still,  
Was counting winter dinners, one a hill,  
With half an ear to the piano’s vigor.

All that piano and new paint back there,  
Was it some money suddenly come into?  
Or some extravagance young love had been to?  
Or old love on an impulse not to care-

Not to sink under being man and wife,  
But get some color and music out of life?

## Canis Major

The great Overdog.  
That heavenly beast  
With a star in one eye,  
Gives a leap in the east.

He dances upright  
All the way to the west  
And never once drops  
On his forefeet to rest.

I’m a poor underdog,  
But tonight I will bark  
With the great Overdog  
That romps through the dark.

## Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound’s the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.