



wilmington concert opera presents

alyssa brode, soprano
kat bowman, piano

thirtysomething

a recital of music by composers in their 30s

saturday, march 7, 2026 at 6 pm
presbyterian church of the covenant
wilmington, de

program

tap the song name to see texts and translations;
tap the line before each set to see program notes for that set

Ballade à la Lune

Cecile Chaminade

who are you, little i

Christine Donkin

from *Three Cummings Settings*

Thunderstorms

Arthur Bliss

from *Three Songs*

Bei dir allein

Franz Schubert

from *Vier Refrainlieder*

J'ai frappé

Nadia Boulanger

Climbing Uphill

Jason Robert Brown

from *The Last Five Years*

Don't Laugh

Mary Rodgers & Stephen Sondheim

from *Hot Spot*

- brief pause -

I want to Be Soft

Lisa Neher

Ansturm

from *Vier Lieder*

Alma Mahler

Colorblind

Adam F. Duritz & Charles Gillingham

Who Am I?

from *Peter Pan*

Leonard Bernstein

1904

from *Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire*

Francis Poulenc

In the Luxembourg Gardens

from *Sketches of Paris*

Kathleen Lockhart Manning

Le poulpe

from *Le Bestiaire*

Louis Durey

Leisure

from *Three Songs*

Arthur Bliss

The vagabond

from *Songs of Travel*

Ralph Vaughan Williams

tap the song name to see texts and translations;
tap the line before each set to see program notes for that set

***thirtysomething* runs approximately 45 minutes
including a 5-minute pause**

program notes, song texts, and translations

This first set coalesces around themes of nature, self-reflection, and ruminations on the passage of time. In ***Ballade à la Lune***, the moon stands in for the speaker's own journey of exploration—representing something ever-changing yet seemingly timeless—while they reckon with their own place in this vast universe. In ***who are you, little i***, the poetry by E. E. Cummings uses the familiar symbolism of a sunset to represent time's passage... but here, the viewing of the sunset almost pauses time itself. In the stillness of the moment, the adult and child self are equally represented: a line stretching through time, connecting who the speaker was and who they are presently. The nature imagery in ***Thunderstorms*** is equal parts tumultuous and peaceful: heavy rains juxtaposed with dancing flowers and birdsong, depicting an internal emotional struggle.

Ballade à la Lune (Ballad to the Moon)

music by Cecile Chaminade (1857-1944) (age written: 37)

text by Louis Charles Alfred de Musset (1810-1857)

C'était, dans la nuit brune,
It was, in the dark night,
Sur le clocher jauni,
On the yellowed steeple,
La lune,
The moon,
Comme un point sur un "i".

Like the dot of an "i".

Lune, quel esprit sombre

Moon, what dark spirit

Promène au bout d'un fil,

Walks at the end of a leash,

Dans l'ombre,

Through the shadow,

Ta face et ton profil?

Your face and your profile?

Es-tu l'œil du ciel borgne?

Are you the one-eyed spirit?

Quel chérubin cafard

What gloomy cherub

Nous lorgne

Is peering at us

Sous ton masque blafard?

Beneath your pale mask?

N'es-tu rien qu'une boule,

Are you nothing but a ball,

Qu'un grand faucheur bien gras

A big, fat reaper

Qui roule

Who rolls around

Sans pattes et sans bras?

Without legs or arms?

Es-tu, je t'en soupçonne,

Are you, I suspect,

Le vieux cadran de fer

The old iron clock

Qui sonne

That strikes

L'heure aux damnés d'enfer?

The hour of the damned in hell?

Sur ton front qui voyage,

On your traveling brow,

Ce soir, ont-ils compté

Tonight, have they counted

Quel âge

How long

A leur éternité?

Is their eternity?

Est-ce un ver qui te ronge

Is it a worm eating you away

Quand ton disque noirci

When your blackened disc

S'allonge

Lengthens

En croissant rétréci?

Into a shrunken crescent?

Qui t'avait éborgnée,

Who blinded you,

L'autre nuit? T'étais-tu

The other night? Did you

Cognée

Bump

A quelqu'arbre pointu?

Into some sharp tree?

Car tu vins, pâle et morne

For you came, pale and gloomy

Coller sur mes carreaux

To press against my windowpanes

Ta corne

Your horn

à travers les barreaux.

Through the bars.

Va, lune moribonde,

Go, dying moon,

Le beau corps de Phébé,

The beautiful body of Phoebe,

La blonde,

The blonde,

Dans la mer est tombé.

Fallen into the sea.

Tu n'en es que la face

You are but its face

Et déjà, tout ridé,

And already, all wrinkled,

S'efface

Fades away

Ton front dépossédé.

Your dispossessed brow.

Comme un ours à la chaîne,

Like a bear on a chain,

Toujours sous tes yeux bleus

Always beneath your blue eyes

Se traîne l'océan montueux.

The mountainous ocean drags itself along.

Toujours!

Always!

Et qu'il vente ou qu'il neige,

And, come wind or snow,
Moi-même, chaque soir,
Myself, each evening,
Que fais-je,
What am I doing,
Venant ici m'asseoir?
Coming here to sit?

Je viens voir à la brune,
I come to see at dusk,
Sur le clocher jauni,
On the yellowed steeple,
La lune,
The moon,
Comme un point sur un "i".
Like a dot of an "i".

who are you, little i

from Three Cummings Settings

music by Christine Donkin (b.1976) **(age written: 36)**

text by E. E. Cummings (1894-1962)

who are you, little i

(five or six years old)
peering from some high

window; at the gold

of november sunset

(and feeling: that if day
has to become night

this is a beautiful way)

Thunderstorms

from *Three Songs*

music by Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) (**age written: 32**)

text by W. H. Davies (1871-1940)

My mind has thunderstorms
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds

Yet come, dark thunderstorms
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds

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In the midst of questioning one's place and purpose,
Bei dir allein celebrates the unparalleled beauty and
security of being truly known; how life becomes vibrant
when seen and loved for exactly who you are.

Bei dir allein (With you alone)

from *Vier Refrainlieder*

music by Franz Schubert (1797-1828) (age written: 31)

text by Johann Gabriel Seidl (1804-1875)

Bei dir allein empfind' ich, daß ich lebe,

With you alone I feel that I am alive,

Daß Jugendmut mich schwellt

that a spirit of youth swells within me,

Daß eine heit're Welt

that a joyful world

Der Liebe mich durchbebe;

of love surges through me;

Mich freut mein Sein

I rejoice in my existence

Bei dir allein!

with you alone!

Bei dir allein weht mir die Luft so labend,

With you alone does the breeze feel so refreshing,

Dünkt mich die Flur so grün,

the meadow so green to me,

So mild des Lenzes Blüh'n,

so gentle the spring bloom,

So balsamreich der Abend,

so balmy the evening,

So kühl der Hain,
so cool the grove,
Bei dir allein!
with you alone!

Bei dir allein
With you alone,
verliert der Schmerz sein Herbes,
pain loses its bitterness
Gewinnt die Freud an Lust!
and joy yields such pleasure!
Du sicherst meine Brust
You secure in my heart
Des angestammten Erbes;
the ancestral legacy;
Ich fühl' mich mein
I feel I am myself
Bei dir allein!
with you alone!

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These next two pieces capture frustration and difficulty moving forward despite one's best efforts. Though *J'ai frappé* could represent these feelings on a broad scale, I've paired it with *Climbing Uphill* to represent an honest portrayal of how an artistic career path often feels: hard work, talent and perseverance that are often unseen or unappreciated, feeling invisible in a sea of performers just like you, and the impossible standards we are held to, sometimes by ourselves most of all.

J'ai frappé (I have struck)

music by Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) (**age written: 35**)

text by Jean-François Bourguignon (1876-1953)

Ma main a frappé les portes closes

My hand has struck closed doors

Et d'autres mains au loin

And other hands from afar

ont répondu.

have replied.

Mon front a frappé les portes closes

My brow has struck closed doors

Et d'autres fronts au loin

And other brows from afar

ont répondu.

have replied.

Mon cœur a frappé les portes closes

My heart has struck closed doors

Mais l'écho de mon cœur seul

But only my heart's echo

a répondu.

has replied.

Climbing Uphill

from The Last Five Years

music and text by Jason Robert Brown (b.1970) (age written: 31)

*When you come home to me
I'll wear a sweeter smile
And hope that, for a while, you'll—*

I'm climbing uphill, Daddy
Climbing uphill

I'm up every morning at six
And standing in line
With two hundred girls
Who are younger and thinner than me
Who have already been to the gym

I'm waiting five hours in line
And watching the girls
Just coming and going
In dresses that look just like this
Till my number is finally called

When I walk in the room
There's a table of men
Always men—usually gay
Who've been sitting like I have
And listening all day
To two hundred girls
Belting as high as they can!

I am a good person
I'm an attractive person
I am a talented person
Grant me grace!

When you come home...

I should have told them I was sick last week

They're gonna think this is the way I sing

Why is the pianist playing so loud?

Should I sing louder?

I'll sing louder

Maybe I should stop and start over

I'm gonna stop and start over

Why is the director staring at his crotch?

Why is that man staring at my resume?

Don't stare at my resume

I made up half of my resume

Look at me

Stop looking at that, look at me

No, not at my shoes

Don't look at my shoes

I hate these fucking shoes

Why did I pick these shoes?

Why did I pick this song?

Why did I pick this career?

Why does this pianist hate me?

If I don't get the callback

I can go to Crate and Barrel with Mom and buy a couch

Not that I want to spend a day with Mom

But Jamie needs space to write

Since I'm obviously such a horrible,

annoying distraction to him

What's he gonna be like when we have kids?

And once again...

Why am I working so hard?

These are the people who cast Linda Blair in a musical
Jesus Christ, I suck, I suck, I suck

When finally you come home to—

I will not be the girl stuck at home in the 'burbs

With the baby, the dog, and the garden of herbs

I will not be the girl in the sensible shoes

Pushing burgers and beer nuts and missing the clues

I will not be the girl who gets asked how it feels

To be trotting along at the genius's heels

I will not be the girl who requires a man to get by

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Don't Laugh is a journey unto itself, in which Sally acknowledges the shortcomings she sees in herself while resolving to join the Peace Corps. By the time she speaks in the third person in the final verse, she has been accepted and is determined to make positive change despite her own self-identified failings, finding a new confidence in herself.

I fell in love with this song after seeing Victoria Clark's rendition from Stephen Sondheim's 80th birthday special: all at once silly, self-deprecating, and so full of heart. What better time to sing it myself than as part of *thirtysomething*, a program that represents me in transition... not necessarily knowing what comes next, and too often finding fault with myself, but with a palpable desire to do both *well* and *good*. (Classic Sondheim word mastery!)

Don't Laugh

from *Hot Spot*

music and text by Mary Rodgers (1931-2014) (**age written: 32**)
and Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021) (**age written: 33**)

Maybe it's my name,
Maybe it's my face,
Maybe it's my... both.
All I know is...

Show me a glass of water;
I'll show you a soggy dress.
Show me a tube of toothpaste;
I'll show you a mess.

Show me a fresh-laid sidewalk,
And guess where my footprints are.
Show me a fire hydrant;
I'll show you my car.

Show me the latest dance step;
I'll show you the latest fall.
Show me the train to Boston;
I'll show you St. Paul!
Show me a hundred lighters;
I'll show you the one that won't.
Show me a priceless vase—
No, don't!

Maybe I can do—
Don't laugh—
Good.

Maybe I can do—
Don't laugh—
Well.

Maybe you could be—
Who knows?—
Proud.

All right, so laugh—
But not too loud.

If I can convince—
Don't laugh—
Me,
Why can't I convince—
Don't leave!—
You?
Give me half a chance,
Just half,

And then—
Don't laugh!—
Maybe I could be
Proud of me too.

Ask me to give directions;
I'll show you a vacant lot.
Show me a knot that's tangled;
I'll show you a tangled knot.
Show me a nest of hornets...

Maybe it's my name.
Maybe it's my face.
Maybe it's my self.

Sally is gonna do—
Don't laugh—
Good.
Sally is gonna do—
Don't laugh—
Well.
Everything's gonna be—
You watch—
Fine.
You hear a laugh;
That laugh is mine!

Everything will be done—
I hope—
Right.
Everything will be right;
Don't ask how!
Look at it all fall into place!

Maybe it's my name;
Maybe it's my face.
Give me a job to do,
And I'll show you now!

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brief pause

This set is the most personal for me, because feeling things incredibly deeply is so directly tied to who I am at my core. The life experience of a highly sensitive person is a roller coaster; it can be painful, it can be messy, and it can be exceptionally beautiful. Sensitive people are constantly exploring and questioning (**Who Am I?**). We experience emotions larger than we can control (**Ansturm**) and sometimes more complicated than we can understand (**Colorblind**). And we open ourselves up to pain rather than repress what we feel (**I Want to Be Soft**). Deeply emotional people are often told to temper these big feelings, or that we are too much... but part of my own journey, and what makes this set so integral to *thirtysomething*, has been embracing this facet of myself, and learning never to apologize for the simple human act of feeling.

I Want to Be Soft

music and text by Lisa Neher (b.1985) (age written: 37)

I want to be soft
like a moon snail outside its shell
like the underbelly of a porcupine.

I'm run down from resilience
camouflaging as confident
walking under the weight of a carapace.
mask on, defenses up.

The arboreal salamander breathes through its skin
water circulates through the pores of the sponge
I want to be permeable, like that.

Ansturm (Storm)

from *Vier Lieder*

music by Alma Mahler (1879-1964) (age written: 36)

text by Richard Dehmel (1863-1920)

O zürne nicht, wenn mein Begehren

O do not be angry when my emotion

dunkel aus seinen Grenzen bricht,

bursts darkly out of its bounds,

soll es uns selber nicht verzehren,

to avoid consuming us both,

muß es heraus ans Licht!

it must break out into light!

Fühlst ja, wie all mein Innres brandet,

You feel how my inner feelings surge,

und wenn herauf der Aufruhr bricht,

and when the tumult breaks through,

jäh über deinen Frieden strandet,

and suddenly spills over your peace,

dann bebst du,

then you quiver,

aber du zürnst mir nicht.

but you do not rail at me.

Colorblind

music by Adam F. Duritz (b.1961) (age written: 37)

and Charles Gillingham (b.1960) (age written: 38)

text by Adam F. Duritz

I am colorblind

Coffee black and egg white

Pull me out from inside
I am ready, I am ready, I am ready

I am
Taffy stuck and tongue tied
Stutter shook and uptight
Pull me out from inside
I am ready, I am ready, I am ready
I am fine

I am covered in skin
No one gets to come in
Pull me out from inside
I am folded and unfolded and unfolding
I am
Colorblind
Coffee black and egg white
Pull me out from inside
I am ready, I am ready, I am ready
I am fine

Who Am I?

from *Peter Pan*

music and text by Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)
(age written: 32)

Funny, the thoughts I have at night.
So different from the thoughts I have by day.
The moment mama switches off the light,
A thousand different questions come my way,
And stay.

Who am I?
Was it all planned in advance

Or was I just born by chance
In July?

Oh, who on earth am I?
Did I ever live before
As a mountain lion or
As a fly?

My friends only think of fun,
They're all such incurable tots.
Can I be the only one
Who thinks these mysterious thoughts?

Someday I'll die.
Will I ever live again
As a rooster or a hen
Or a lion in a den
Or a robin or a wren
Or a fly?
Oh, who am I?

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*“Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?”*

- Mary Oliver

I've chosen to close *thirtysomething* with this set that, for me, calls to mind and attempts to answer the question above. Themes of travel*, soaking in new experiences, companionship, and romanticizing life's small pleasures serve both as the common links between the texts and as the connections to my own 30s. In **1904**, the speaker recounts various cities and festivals, delicacies tasted and characters discovered along the journey, and relishes in witnessing the beauty and the ugliness of it all—but laments not being able to share it with a loved one. ***In the Luxembourg Gardens*** finds as much pleasure in people watching as in the manicured surroundings, particularly noting the passion between two young lovers. ***Le poulpe*** describes an octopus with admiration for how unapologetically it lives and feasts. The straightforward text of ***Leisure*** questions what life is worth if we don't take the time to appreciate the beauty that surrounds us. And finally, ***The vagabond***, which extols the joys of a life rich in experiences... all while accepting what cannot be changed, finding abundance in what nature has given, and moving ever forward on the road ahead.

*also featured: a theme of sampling delicious treats, inextricably linked to travel (and, yes, to me)

1904

from *Quatre poèmes de Guillaume Apollinaire*

music by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) (age written: 32)

text by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)

À Strasbourg en dix-neuf-cent-quatre

I went to Strasbourg in 1904.

J'arrivai pour le lundi gras

I arrived in time for Lundi Gras.¹

À l'hôtel m'assis devant l'âtre

At the hotel I sat in front of the fire

Près d'un chanteur de l'Opéra

near an opera singer

Qui ne parlait que de théâtre

who only talked about the theatre.

La Kellnerine rousse avait

The red-headed waitress

Mis sur sa tête un chapeau rose

wore a pink hat

Comme Hébé qui les dieux servait

such as Hebe, who served the gods,

N'en eut jamais. Ô belles choses

never had. Oh beautiful things:

Carnaval chapeau rose Ave!

Carnival, pink hat, Ave!

À Rome à Nice et à Cologne

In Rome, in Nice and in Cologne,

Dans les fleurs et les confetti

among the flowers and confetti,

¹ The day that kicks off Carnival festivities

Carnaval j'ai revu ta trogne,
Carnival, I've seen your ugly face.

Ô roi plus riche et plus gentil

Oh king, richer and kinder

Que Crésus Rothschild et Torlogne

than Croesus, Rothschild and Torlogne.²

Je soupai d'un peu de foie gras

I dined on a bit of foie gras,

De chevreuil tendre à la compôte

on tender venison with stewed fruits,

De tartes flans et cetera

on pies, custard tarts, and so on.

Un peu de kirsch me ravigote

A bit of kirsch warmed me up.

Que ne t'avais-je entre mes bras.

Why weren't you in my arms?

² Historical figures known for their wealth

In the Luxembourg Gardens

from Sketches of Paris

music and text by Kathleen Lockhart Manning (1890-1951)

(age written: 35)

When shadows fall I wander thro' the gardens,

Among the flowers and grass,

I linger on the beauty all around me:

Then two lovers pass.

The autumn leaves are falling thro' the gardens,

But in their heart is spring!

I hear him murmur: "Ah! je t'aime!"
As she answers low: "Cher ami!"

I linger on the beauty all around me,
As the hours pass.

Le poulpe (The Octopus)

from *Le Bestiaire*

music by Louis Durey (1888-1979) (age written: 31)

text by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)

Jetant son encre vers les cieux,
Squirting his ink towards the sky,
Suçant le sang de ce qu'il aime
sucking the blood of what he loves
Et le trouvant délicieux,
and finding it delicious,
Ce monstre inhumain,
that inhuman monster,
c'est moi-même.
it is me.

Leisure

from *Three Songs*

music by Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) (age written: 32)

text by William Henry Davies (1871-1940)

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like stars at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

The vagabond

from Songs of Travel

music by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

(age written: 32)

text by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)

Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above,
And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river—
There's the life for a man like me,
There's the life for ever.

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.

Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

Or let autumn fall on me
Where afield I linger,
Silencing the bird on tree,
Biting the blue finger.
White as meal the frosty field—
Warm the fireside haven—
Not to autumn will I yield,
Not to winter even!

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around,
And the road before me.
Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I ask, the heaven above,
And the road below me.

with thanks to wilmington concert opera,
kat bowman, and everyone else
who made this possible...
including you for being here to share it!

thirtysomething

program design by alyssa brode