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RODRIGO RUIZ

# VENUS & ADONIS

A SONG CYCLE AFTER SHAKESPEARE

**GRACE** DAVIDSON  
GEORGE **HERBERT**



# VENUS & ADONIS

A SONG CYCLE AFTER SHAKESPEARE

RODRIGO RUIZ (b.1988)

VENUS & ADONIS • B♭ MAJOR • R.10

Commissioned by Grace Davidson

**49.09**

1	I	A THOUSAND HONEY SECRETS	02.46
2	II	FROSTY IN DESIRE	03.39
3	III	THIS COUNTLESS DEBT	01.01
4	IV	A SPIRIT ALL OF FIRE	05.35
5	V	NO MORE OF LOVE	02.31
6	VI	THE PLEASANT FOUNTAINS	02.19
7	VII	GIVE ME MY HAND	02.07
8	VIII	SO HE WILL KISS HER STILL	01.39
9	IX	IN EARTH OR HEAVEN?	05.47
10	X	BESTOWED IN VAIN	02.41
11	XI	A CHURLISH SWINE	03.16
12	XII	GOOD NIGHT	01.25
13	XIII	CONFOUNDED IN THE DARK	01.35
14	XIV	THE GENTLE LARK	02.15
15	XV	THE FOUL BOAR'S CONQUEST	03.39
16	XVI	TWO LAMPS BURNT OUT	03.29
17	XVII	MY SWEET LOVE'S FLOWER	03.23
	Total		<b>49.09</b>

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## FOREWORD

I became almost obsessed with it. Months had gone by and I could not get William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* out of my mind. The musicality of its verses, the magical cadence of its rhythms, the tender love she proved, his unkind rejection; all these had glued the book to these, my hands, the poem to my eyes. It was at this time and under these circumstances that Grace Davidson and I met at a café in London in 2018. A delicious scone accompanied our conversation, which soon turned to the master Bard. When we had recorded *An Everlasting Dawn* (2017), Grace had been very encouraging and expressed an interest in my music, the memory of which encouraged me to confess I was considering setting *Venus and Adonis* to music—a song cycle, naturally. She loved the idea. We spoke about it some more and, soon enough, I had my work cut out for me.

The first step was to select those parts of the poem that would become the song texts. I tried to be as least intrusive as possible. It was daunting (for the sheer beauty of each verse begs not be cut), and yet necessary (due to the practical impossibility of setting 1194 lines of text to music). And so I cut: each cut a wound stoically borne for music's sake, like the sweet maple bears the bitter axe that wounds it for its honeyed sap. Creating a convincing dramatic arc with a good mix of varying styles and contrasting episodes was tough. Achieving a well-balanced distribution of the text between all three characters (i.e. Venus, Adonis, and the Poet) was hardly any easier, and required some clever editing at times. In the end, however, my efforts found me satisfaction.

The matter of musical cohesion had to be addressed as well. As with any set of songs, the texts themselves already offer a natural structure and cohesion of sorts, but that is hardly enough in a composition where language and music must cooperate in harmony. Creating explicit transitions from one song to the next crossed my mind early on, but seemed to me to work better for shorter cycles, such as Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. Perhaps a judicious

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use of this, complemented by other techniques, would be best; something closer to Schumann's song cycles, whose connections linking song to song, although not always explicit, are exquisite, subtle, and incredibly effective.

What of the question of cohesion in the musical construction as such, I wondered. Should I tread Beethoven's path or Wagner's? On one side we have what I like to call a 'causal approach,' in which every single detail—from ornamentation and key relations, to surface and background material, and even overall structure—is the effect of a primal cause; this *causa causarum* Beethoven called *Das Thema*. On the other side, we find discernible *Leitmotifs* to achieve long-term musical cohesion, and to indicate otherwise-obscure associations between the underlying themes of the work; this could be termed the archetypal approach. The inner debate dissolved when, to my astonishment, I realised both could coexist. (If it seems hard to imagine this discovery astonishing, reflect on this: who has the benefit of hindsight *a priori*?).

At the very beginning, for instance, Adonis' relation to hunting is made musically evident by his theme being sounded in a horn call's guise; it so happens that it also is the first case of word painting in the cycle, for 'hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.' This theme is later augmented in the minor mode, and placed in the bass to support a series of suspensions and *appoggiature* that breathe life into the boar's theme—Adonis' transformed *Leitmotif* lying under the theme of the boar, is the music's allusion to the tragic end of the mortal's life, run over by the savage beast.

This approach, combined with the madrigalisms without which songs cease to be songs, allowed me a wide range of expressive devices whilst creating a strong sense of long-range continuity and cohesiveness that weighs not on the listener—one dare hope!

**RODRIGO RUIZ**

5 December 2020 • Rome, Italy

RODRIGO RUIZ

# VENUS & ADONIS

STEPHEN RODGERS • LINER NOTES

**I remember vividly when I first heard Rodrigo Ruiz's music.** I was listening to a randomized playlist of new classical releases on Apple Music and happened upon a movement from a sonata for piano and violin. It began with a plaintive, minor-key introduction, followed by a glowing theme in F major, like the sun peering through clouds after a rainstorm. The piece sounded a little like Felix Mendelssohn to me, but that couldn't be, because Mendelssohn only wrote three violin sonatas, and this wasn't one of them. Maybe it was Dvořák? Or perhaps a hidden gem from the Romantic era that I didn't know?

I was surprised to discover that the music was written in 2019; it was the first movement of Ruiz's Violin Sonata, R. 6, from Behold the Stars, his album of chamber music (also released by Signum Classics). I devoured his music after that. **I listened to it on loop on long walks,** I taught it in my music theory classes, and I devoted an episode of my Resounding Verse podcast to one of his songs. I even had the chance to meet him on Zoom in 2021, when we had a delightfully free-ranging conversation about his music—and also about poetry, our mutual love of



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Schubert songs, and our experience at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, where (as fate would have it) we both got undergraduate degrees, he in 2011 and I in 1998.

Rodrigo Ruiz's music, I came to understand, is no mere imitation of Mendelssohn or Dvořák. Yes, it sounds like the music of these composers—and also, by turns, like Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, and Brahms. But he isn't trying to mimic their styles, as a fledgling painter might mimic the work of earlier artists to master a technique. He is just writing what comes naturally to him. **This isn't model composition; it's composition, pure and simple.** Ruiz grew up in Tijuana, Mexico, listening to his father's records of Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms, and he internalized their music to such a degree that once he began improvising at the piano, and writing down those improvisations, he produced music that breathed with the same spirit. He learned their style the way a child learns a native language.

Yet, as with any native speaker, **he also speaks with his own voice**, and that voice is clear on this new album, a cycle of seventeen songs based on William Shakespeare's narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, about the unrequited love that a goddess feels for a mortal man. (Ruiz judiciously chose only certain portions of the 1194-line poem, creating a dramatic arc with texts distributed evenly between three characters: Venus, Adonis, and the Poet.) **What strikes me most** about the cycle, and about Ruiz's music in general, **is his ability to move effortlessly between turbulence and tenderness; no matter the emotional extremes, the music flows.** (It's the same trait I sensed in the opening of his violin sonata, where quiet unrest opens up into warmth and light.) **You can hear these deftly managed transitions across songs**, especially when one song proceeds without pause to the next, **which creates a strong narrative through-line.** But distinct and separated songs are joined in subtler ways. Song II ("Frosty in desire")—in which the "glowing fire" of Venus's passion meets Adonis's cold disinterest—ends tenuously, with a quiet F-major chord in the middle register of the piano, and Song III ("This countless debt") starts *Allegro vivace* with sixteenth notes evoking Venus's determination to get her man—frost is followed by fire. But the emotional shift sounds





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natural because even though “This countless debt” is in a different key (B-flat minor), its first phrase prolongs the dominant chord in that key (F major). This single chord is like a keyhole separating two rooms.

**Even more remarkable is how turmoil and sweetness, frustration and hope, anxiety and joy blend seamlessly within individual songs.** Song IV (“A spirit all of fire”) begins with Venus’s tender entreaty to Adonis, set as a soaring aria; then adds a note of pity, the music turning more dissonant as she wonders why Adonis thinks love is so “heavy”; then modulates to anger as she tells Adonis he should just woo himself; and finally returns to tenderness as she invites him to “touch but my lips with those fair lips of thine” and her hopefulness pours out in a piano postlude that could come right out of Robert Schumann’s pen. Song XV (“The foul bear’s conquest”), in which Venus searches for Adonis in the woods, expresses her determination, her mounting anxiety, and her shock at encountering wounded hunting dogs and a boar whose mouth is “bepainted all in red.” Even Adonis, arguably more one-dimensional than Venus, gets a full range of musical expression. In Song VIII (“So he will kiss her still”) he seems at first to laugh when Venus faints—the music is marked *Allegro giocoso* (fast and playful), and the piano plays staccato arpeggios. But then, fearing she has died, Adonis grows fretful as the music shifts into a minor key, and finally kisses her gently as the playful opening material returns but then diminishes into a quiet cadence. You can hear Adonis softening to Venus, letting his guard down.

In the foreword to the score Ruiz mentions his fondness for “madrigalisms,” referring to the kind of word painting characteristic of Renaissance madrigals. In word painting, what is “painted” is often something you see or hear—a storm, a bird call, a cry of pain, etc. Ruiz’s piece contains many of these sight-and-sound madrigalisms: the best example is the horn call that appears throughout the cycle, evoking Adonis’s love of hunting; Ruiz also captures the sound of barking hounds in Song XV (“The foul bear’s conquest”) and the sound of a bird singing in Song XIV (“The gentle lark”). **Yet the more I listened, the more I realized that**

**his greatest feat is his ability to “paint” the slightest fluctuations of emotion.** We hear what Venus and Adonis feel from moment to moment; the music tracks their feelings like some kind of emotional barometer. This is an immense challenge for a song composer: how to use music to capture the emotions behind the words without being too obvious or overwrought, without turning characters into caricatures. I have composed enough songs to know how hard it can be to do this, and to know how often I have failed. **Rodrigo Ruiz succeeds every time.** In each song, there is at least one passage that induces a sigh of astonishment, a gasp, a chill—a moment that makes me think there can be no better way to set these words and express this emotion. I started writing exclamation points in the score every time I encountered one of these moments, and soon my score was covered with them.

**In each song, there is at least one passage that induces a sigh of astonishment, a gasp, a chill.**

One of my favorite moments is the beginning of Song IX (“In earth of heaven?”), a song that lies at the expressive heart of the cycle. Venus awakes after fainting, uncertain where she is.

**Ruiz evokes a range of feelings**—drowsiness, uncertainty, momentary blissfulness—**with the simplest of musical means.** The piano introduction, starting tentatively with eighth notes that alternate between the right and left hands and then blossoming into rolling thirty-second notes, sounds almost improvised, and the true key of the song (A-flat major) only becomes clear after the voice enters. This is music coming into being, finding its orientation just as Venus does.



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Another favorite moment appears in Song XVII (“Here was thy father’s bed”), the final song. Adonis has died, and a flower grows from the earth beneath him. Venus picks the flower and sings

Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest,  
my throbbing heart shall rock thee day and night;  
there shall not be one minute in an hour  
wherein I will not kiss my sweet love’s flower.

**Ruiz writes a lullaby, which Grace Davidson and George Herbert perform with poignant restraint.** On the final word of the poem, the vocal melody and the piano lead to a dominant harmony that wants to resolve, but instead of a resolution we hear a measure of silence... and then a delicate piano postlude that returns to a melodic motive we have heard throughout the song—just three notes, moving up slowly by semitones—and then dissipates. When I listen to this passage, I imagine Venus carried off in the sky by her silver doves, I sense her reluctance to leave her beloved and his place of earthly rest, I hear a love song that stops (because the song cycle must end) but also seems to extend beyond the final bar line, and I think of those in my own life whom I have lost—the silence that follows their departure but also the memories of them that linger. Above all, **I marvel at how Rodrigo Ruiz has managed to take this mythological tale about a goddess and an idealized man and make it deeply human.**



# VENUS & ADONIS

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SONG TEXTS



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**1** I A THOUSAND HONEY SECRETS

---

*Even as the sun with purple-coloured face  
had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,  
rose-cheeked Adonis hied him to the chase;  
hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.*

(1-4)

**VENUS**

Thrice fairer than myself, . . . . .  
the field's chief flower, sweet above compare,  
stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man:

Vouchsafe, thou wonder, to alight thy steed;  
if thou wilt deign this favour, for thy meed  
a thousand honey secrets shalt thou know.

Here come and sit, where never serpent hisses,  
and being set, I'll smother thee with kisses;

and yet not cloy thy lips with loathed satiety,  
but rather famish them amid their plenty.  
Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty.

(7-9, 13, 15-20, 22)

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**2** II FROSTY IN DESIRE

---

**POET**

With this she seizeth on his sweating palm,  
and trembling in her passion, calls it balm,  
Earth's sovereign salve to do a goddess good.

Pure shame and awed resistance made him fret,  
which bred more beauty in his angry eyes.

So fastened in her arms Adonis lies;

still is he sullen, still he lours and frets,  
'twixt crimson shame and anger ashy pale.

Still she entreats, and prettily entreats;  
she red [and hot] as coals of glowing fire,  
he [red for shame, but] frosty in desire.

(25, 27-8, 69-70, 68, 75-6, 73, 35-6)

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**3** III THIS COUNTLESS DEBT

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**POET**

Look how he can, she cannot choose but love;  
and by her fair immortal hand she swears  
from his soft bosom never to remove  
till he take truce with her contending tears;  
and one sweet kiss shall pay this countless  
debt.

But when her lips were ready for his pay,  
he winks, and turns his lips another way.

(79-84, 89-90)

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**4** IV A SPIRIT ALL OF FIRE

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**VENUS**

Love is a spirit all . . . . . of fire,  
not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire.

Witness this primrose bank whereon I lie:  
These forceless flowers . . . support me;  
two strengthless doves will draw me through  
the sky.

Is love so light, sweet boy, and may it be  
that thou should think it heavy unto thee?

Is thine own heart to thine own face affected?  
Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left?  
Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected.

Were I hard-favoured, foul, or wrinkled-old,  
then mightst thou pause; . . . . .  
but having no defects, why dost abhor me?

Touch but my lips with those fair lips of thine;  
the kiss shall be thine own as well as mine.

(149-59, 133, 137-8, 115, 117)

---

**5** V NO MORE OF LOVE

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*And now Adonis, with a lazy sprite,  
and with a heavy, dark, disliking eye,  
sourcing his cheeks cries:*

(181-2, 185)

**ADONIS**

Fie, no more of love!  
[The sun doth burn my face;] I must remove.

**VENUS**

Ay me, . . . . . young, and so unkind?  
Art thou a woman's son, and canst not feel  
what 'tis to love, . . . . . ?

Fie, lifeless picture, cold and senseless stone,  
well-painted idol, image dull and dead,  
statue contenting but the eye alone,  
thing like a man, but of no woman bred!

**POET**

And now she weeps, and now she fain  
would speak.  
Being mad before, how doth she now for wits?

Now which way shall she turn? What shall she say?  
(185-7, 201-2, 211-14, 221, 249, 253)

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**6** VI THE PLEASANT FOUNTAINS

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**VENUS**

Fondling, my dear,' since I have hemmed  
thee here

within the circuit of this ivory pale,  
I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;  
Feed were thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:  
[graze on my lips,] and if those hills be dry,  
stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.

(229-34)

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**7** VII GIVE ME MY HAND

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*Full gently now she takes him by the hand,  
a lily prisoned in a gaol of snow,  
or ivory in an alabaster band:  
so white a friend engirts so white a foe.*

(361-4)

**ADONIS**

Give me my hand; . . . why dost thou feel it?

**VENUS**

Give me my heart, . . . and thou shalt have it.

**ADONIS**

For shame, . . . let go, and let me go;  
I pray you hence, and leave me here alone.



**VENUS**

Affection is a coal that must be cooled;  
else, suffered, it will set the heart on fire.

The sea hath bounds, but deep desire hath  
none.

O, learn to love; the lesson is but plain,  
and once made perfect, never lost again.

**ADONIS**

I know not love, . . . nor will not know it,  
unless it be a boar, and then I chase it.  
You hurt my hand with wringing; let us part.

(373-4, 379, 382, 387-9, 407-10, 421)

**8 VIII SO HE WILL KISS HER STILL**

*And<sup>2</sup> like the deadly bullet of a gun,  
his meaning struck her ere his words begun.*

(461-2)

**POET**

And at his look she flatly falleth down,  
for looks kill love, and love by looks reviveth.

The silly boy, believing she is dead,  
claps her pale cheek, . . . ;

for on the grass she lies as she were slain.

. . . . A thousand ways he seeks  
to mend the hurt that his unkindness marred.

He kisses her, and she by her good will  
will never rise, so he will kiss her still.

(463-4, 467-8, 473-4, 477-80)

**9 IX IN EARTH OR HEAVEN**

**VENUS**

O, where am I? . . . In earth or heaven?  
Or in the ocean drenched, or in the fire?  
Do I delight to die, or life desire?

But now I died, and death was lively joy.

Thine eyes<sup>3</sup> have murdered this poor heart  
of mine;  
and these mine eyes, true leaders to their  
queen,  
but for thy piteous lips no more had seen.  
The night of sorrow now is turned to day.

Pure lips, sweet seals in my soft lips imprinted;  
long may they kiss each other, for this cure!

What hour is this? Or morn or weary even?  
O, thou didst kill me: kill me once again!

(493-4, 496, 498, 502-4, 481, 511, 505, 495, 499)

**10 X BESTOWED IN VAIN**

**ADONIS**

The kiss I gave you is bestowed in vain,  
and all in vain you strive against the stream;  
for, by this black-faced night, desire's  
foul nurse,  
your treatise makes me like you worse  
and worse.

Call it not love, for Love to heaven is fled.  
Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,

but Lust's effect is tempest after sun.  
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain;  
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done.

No, lady, no; my heart longs not to groan,  
but soundly . . . sleeps alone.  
I tell you, no; tomorrow I intend<sup>4</sup>  
to hunt the boar. . . .

(771-4, 793, 799-802, 785-6, 587-8)

**11 XI A CHURLISH SWINE**

**VENUS**

O, be advised: thou knowst not what it is  
with javelin's point a churlish swine to gore.  
On his bow-back he hath a battle set  
of bristly pikes that ever threat his foes;  
being moved, he strikes whate'er is in his way,  
and whom he strikes his crooked tushes slay.

Alas, he naught esteems that face of thine.  
O, let him keep his loathsome cabin still;  
come not within his danger by thy will.

His<sup>5</sup> tushes never sheathed he whetteth still,  
like to a mortal butcher bent to kill.

Didst thou not mark my face? Was it not white?  
Sawest thou not signs of fear lurk in mine eye?  
Grew I not faint, and fell I not down right?

What should I do, [seeing thee so indeed,]  
that tremble at th'imagination?  
The thought of it doth make my faint heart bleed,

and fear doth teach it divination:  
If thou encounter with the boar tomorrow,

I prophesy thy death, [my living sorrow].

(615-16, 619-20, 623-4, 631, 637, 639,  
617-18, 643-5, 667-70, 672, 671)

**12 XII GOOD NIGHT**

**ADONIS**

The night is spent. . . .  
And now 'tis dark, and going I shall fall.

**VENUS**

. . . . Why, what of that? . . .  
In night . . . desire sees best of all.

**ADONIS**

I am . . . expected of my friends;  
therefore, [in sadness,] now I will away.

(717, 719, 717, 720, 718, 807)

**13 XIII CONFOUNDED IN THE DARK**

**POET**

With this, he breaketh from the sweet embrace  
of those fair arms which bound him to her breast,  
and homeward through the dark laund runs  
apace;  
leaves Love upon her back deeply distressed.

Which after him she darts, as one on shore  
gazing upon a late-embarked friend;  
so did the merciless and pitchy night  
fold in the object that did feed her sight.

Whereat amazed, as one that unaware  
hath dropped a precious jewel in the flood,



even so confounded in the dark she lay,  
having lost the fair discovery of her way.

(811-14, 817-18, 821-4)

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**14** XIV THE GENTLE LARK

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**VENUS**

Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,  
who<sup>6</sup> wakes the morning, so much o'erworn  
and yet I hear no tidings of my love.<sup>7</sup>

(853, 855/866, 867)

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**15** XV THE FOUL BOAR'S CONQUEST

---

**POET**

She hearkens for his hounds and for his horn:  
Anon she hears them chant it lustily,  
and all in haste she coasteth to the cry.  
How she outruns the wind, the poor wretch!

For now she knows it is no gentle chase.  
And as she runs, the bushes in the way  
. . . . . some kiss her face,  
some twine about her thigh to make her stay.

By this she hears the hounds are at a bay;  
. . . the timorous yelping of the hounds  
appals her senses [and her spirit confounds].

Even now<sup>8</sup> . . . she hears a merry horn,  
whereat she leaps that was but late forlorn.  
For now reviving joy bids her rejoice.  
. . With that . . .<sup>9</sup> she spied the hunted boar,  
whose frothy mouth, bepainted all with red,

a second fear through all her sinews spread.

A thousand spleens bear her a thousand ways;  
she treads the path that she untreads again.  
By this, far off she hears Adonis' voice.

As falcons to the lure, away she flies:  
the grass stoops not, she treads on it so light,  
and in her haste unfortunately spies  
the foul boar's conquest on her fair delight;  
which seen, her eyes, as murd'ered with the view,  
like stars ashamed of day, themselves withdrew.

(868-70, 681/680, 883, 871-3, 877, 881-2, 1025-6,  
977, 900-1, 903, 907-8, 973/978, 1027-32)

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**16** XVI TWO LAMPS BURNT OUT

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**POET**

Where lo, two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lies:  
A wound the loving swine had trenched in  
his soft groin.

No flower was nigh, . . . . .  
but stole his blood and seemed with him  
to bleed.

This solemn sympathy poor Venus noteth.  
Her voice is stopped; she thinks he could not die.  
But through the floodgates breaks the  
silver rain,

the crystal tide that [from her two cheeks fair  
in the sweet channel of her bosom] dropped.

By this the boy that by her side lay killed  
was melted like a vapour from her sight,  
and in his blood [that on the ground lay spilled]

a purple flower sprung up, chequered with white.

(1128, 1052/1116, 1055-7, 1061/1060, 959, 957-8,  
1165-8)

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**17** XVII MY SWEET LOVE'S FLOWER

---

**VENUS**

Here was thy father's bed, here in my breast;  
thou art the next of blood, and 'tis thy right.  
Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest,  
my throbbing heart shall rock thee day and  
night;  
there shall not be one minute in an hour  
wherein I will not kiss my sweet love's flower.

(1183-8)

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**ENDNOTES**

by Rodrigo Ruiz

1 To preserve the meter of the line while staying in direct speech, I changed Shakespeare's 'she saith' to 'my dear'.

2 I changed Shakespeare's 'Or' to 'and' for the line to make sense without the preceding verses.

3 I substituted 'That they' for 'Thine eyes' to keep the meaning of the verse clear in its new context.

4 Shakespeare has the narrator report this verse thus: 'He tells her, no; tomorrow he intends | to hunt the boar.'

5 The substitution of 'Whose' for 'His' is necessary, or the verse would not make sense in its new context.

6 Here Shakespeare has 'and', but the change is necessary in this context.

7 In the original, this verse is narrated: 'and yet she hears no tidings of her love.'

8 Slightly altered from 'Even at this word' in the Bard's poem.

9 And with that word' in the original text.

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Paraphrasing Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, the lyrics below refer to the lines of the poem. Series of spaced dots stand in place of omitted text, permitting the verses to retain their visual shape. Text within square brackets has not been set to music, but here provides the necessary context to better appreciate the beauty of the whole. Italics and smaller font indicate text that is not sung, but that is nonetheless present in the score between the piano staves.

Shakespeare, William. *Venus and Adonis*. In *Shakespeare's Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece and the Shorter Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare (an imprint of Bloombury Publishing), 2007. pp. 131-229.



# GRACE DAVIDSON

• SOPRANO •



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## GRACE DAVIDSON • SOPRANO

'Light, bright, agile and pure are all words that have been used to describe **Grace Davidson's** voice. Yet beneath the gleaming surface of her crystalline sound and pinpoint technical accuracy lie rich reserves of emotional intelligence and expressive artistry. The British soprano's vocal and intuitive armoury enable her to project the vivid contrasts of mood at the heart of her favourite Medieval, Renaissance & Baroque repertoire with near-divine ease, especially so in the works of Hildegard von Bingen, Monteverdi, J.S. Bach, Handel and Vivaldi.'

Her **discography** includes over a decade of recordings, many of which feature her as a soloist: Handel's *Jephtha, Acis and Galatea, Silete venti*, Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610, Pianto della Madonna*, The Lutheran Masses of J. S. Bach and the works by Purcell, Vivaldi and other Baroque composers, to name a few. She has also recorded solo discs with music by Hildegard von Bingen and John Dowland.

Her singing in Fauré's *Requiem* (with the London Symphony Orchestra, Tenebrae, and Nigel Short) was reviewed on BBC Radio 3 by Richard Morrison quite simply: 'Grace Davidson's Pie Jesu is **matchless**.'

Grace has also forged fruitful relationships with many contemporary and film composers such as Joe Hisaishi, Harry Gregson Williams, Hans Zimmer, Howard Shore and Eric Whitacre, but most notably Max Richter who chose her as the solo voice in his 8 hour piece *Sleep* which has been performed all over the world, including Sydney Opera House and The Great Wall Of China. Davidson, born in London, caught the singing bug during infancy and, after a short spell as a trainee chef, set the foundations for her career as a scholarship student at London's Royal Academy of Music.

For more info please visit:

[www.gracedavidsonsoprano.com](http://www.gracedavidsonsoprano.com)



## GEORGE HERBERT

PIANO

**George** was born in Manchester in 2001, and his passion for music was kindled in earnest when he became a chorister at Manchester Cathedral. He is now the Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford, where he accompanies and helps to train New College Choir in its daily services, as well as its recordings and tours. George spent four years at St John's College, Cambridge, first as an organ scholar studying Music and German, and latterly as Assistant Organist.

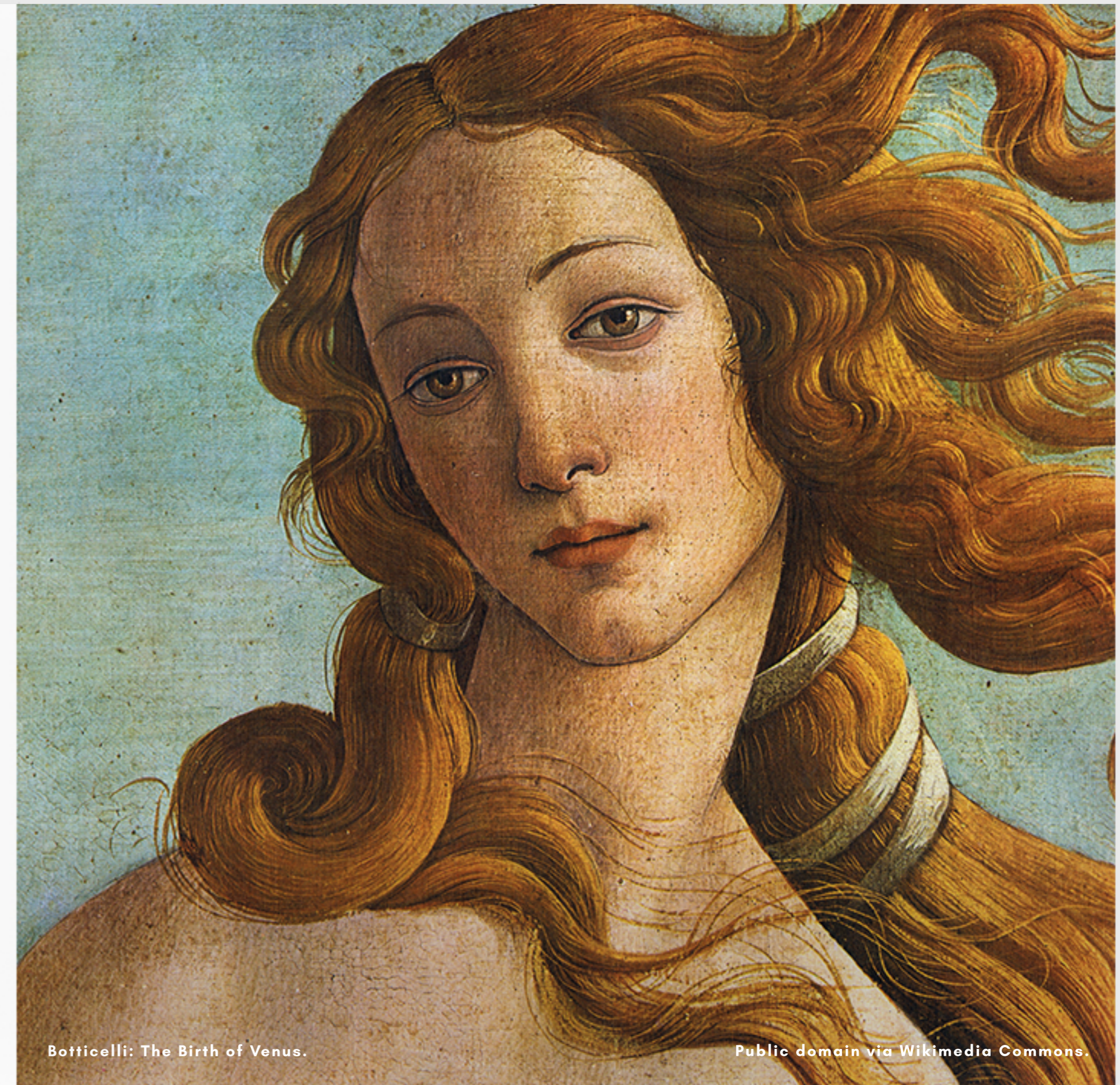


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He spent five months as Deputy Organist at Westminster Abbey alongside regular work as a coach and choir-leader for Pimlico Musical Foundation, Tiffin School and as Assistant Director of Music at His Majesty's Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace.

George is active as a freelance pianist, organist and director. He studied piano with Keval Shah and Michael Dussek, and took regular coaching from Joseph Middleton whilst at Cambridge. George is a regular organ accompanist with Kantos Chamber Choir and Tenebrae, and in 2023 he won the **Northern Ireland International Organ Competition**. He enjoys regular collaborations with the Royal Academy of Music, Armonico Consort and the English National Opera, where he is a freelance member of the music staff. George recently played in the ENO orchestra for performances of Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale*

[www.georgeherbert.net](http://www.georgeherbert.net)



Botticelli: The Birth of Venus.

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• COMPOSER •

RODRIGO  
RUIZ

© Clement Andriot



## RODRIGO RUIZ

Hailed as ‘an **astonishing composing talent**’ (Apple Music), Rodrigo Ruiz’s music, streamed in 150+ countries in the five inhabited continents of the globe, fills a void left by most new music. This ‘unabashedly tonal’ (BBC Music Magazine) and ‘impeccably crafted [music]’ (Apple Music), instantly appeals to musicians and audiences alike, but doesn’t wear after repeated listening. Perhaps this explains why it is in high demand amongst top artists and ensembles around the world.

Rodrigo’s award-winning compositions are published by Universal Edition, with recent commissions coming from soprano Grace Davidson, violinist Kerenza Peacock, violist Ismel Campos, and Mexico’s National System of Musical Endowment (SNFM). His works have been performed in three continents by world-class musicians and ensembles the likes of Huw Watkins MBE, Laura van der Heijden (BBC Young Musician Award 2012), Christopher Glynn (GRAMMY® Award Winner), Francesca Chiejina, Jocelyn Freeman, Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México, Alison Farr, Massimo Spada, José Miguel Rodilla, Iván del Prado and Rodrigo Sierra Moncayo, to name a few.

As part of Signum Classics star-studded artist roster he made his debut in 2021 on the Billboard Classical Charts with his album *Behold the Stars*, which quickly positioned itself as iTunes UK Nº 2 Bestseller, and iTunes US Nº Bestseller; it was included in Apple Music’s Top 10 Albums of the Month, and given a stellar review (★★★★) from BBC Music Magazine.

In 2002, just shy of 14 at the time, the Mexican composer won the State of Baja California’s Outstanding Composition Award at the Second Piano Biennial Competition. In 2008, still in his teens, he became the first generation of Young Artist Fellows at Talentos Artísticos: Valores de Baja California, a programme of Mexico’s Cultural Institute of Baja California (ICBC).

Rodrigo holds a Bachelor of Music *cum laude* in Piano Performance from Lawrence University and a Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Michigan where he was the recipient of the merit-based scholarship of the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, studying under Kenneth Kiesler. He then spent five years specialising in composition under the eminent Francesco Telli of the Conservatorio Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Italy. Later, through the generous help of the prestigious Joseph Campbell Scholarship, he attended the intensive Mythological Studies programme at Pacifica Graduate Institute during 2020/21.

Besides composing, Rodrigo conducts – he was assistant conductor in Naxos Records’ recording of *Milhaud: L’Orestie d’Eschyle*, nominated for the 2015 GRAMMY® Awards for Best Opera Recording— and writes about **music and mythology**. He is fascinated by literature and languages; he speaks fluent Spanish, English, French and Italian, as well as some German.



For more info please visit:

[www.rodoriguiz.com](http://www.rodoriguiz.com)



This album is dedicated to **Aphrodite** within us,  
that all-encompassing principle encouraging us to  
love, love, and then love some more.

A special thank you across the ages to

## **William Shakespeare**

for providing the most beautiful text  
any composer could ask for.

And, as always, to my loving **wife, parents** and  
**sister** for their boundless love and support.

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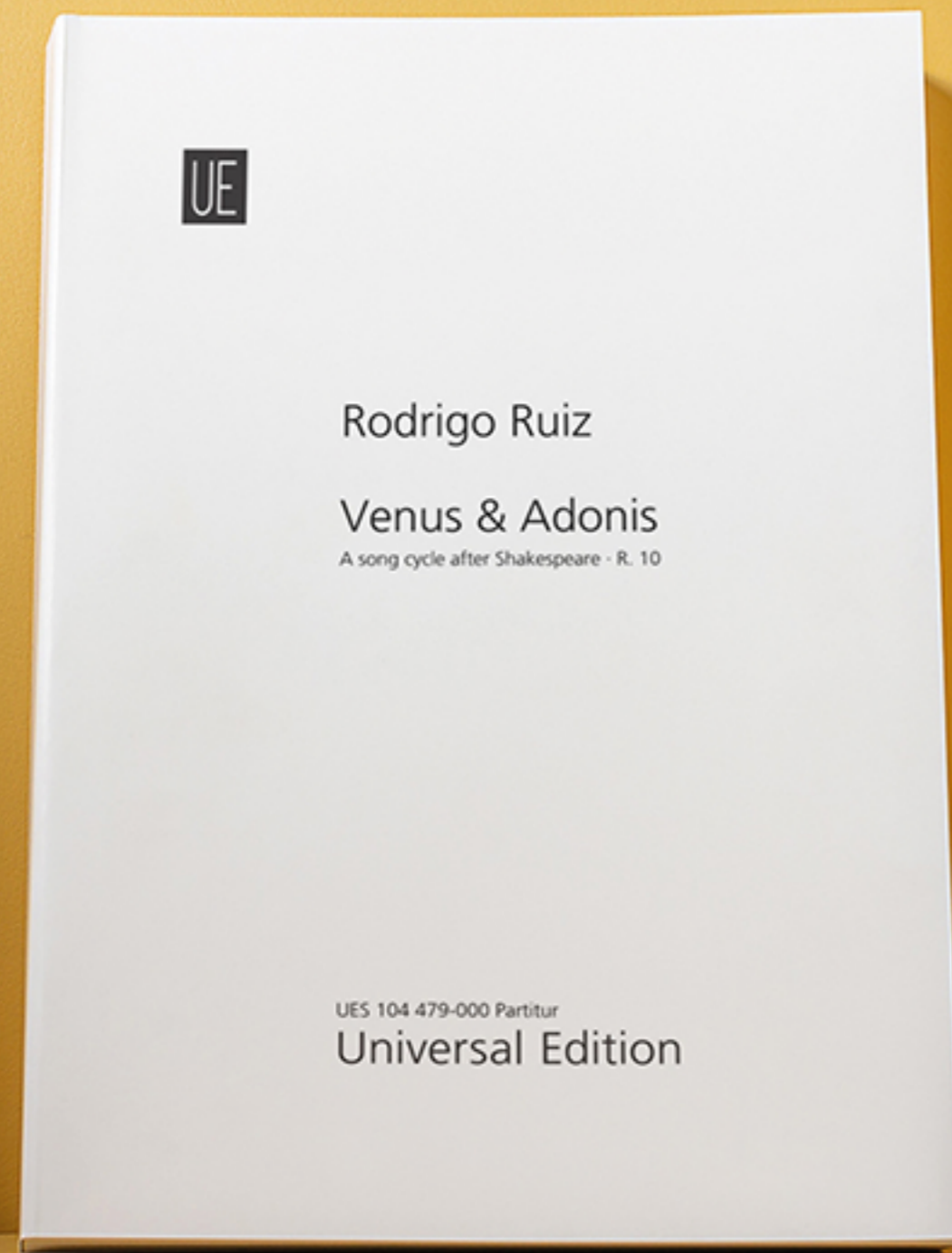
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