

**THE TWENTY-NINTH BATHER**  
for mezzo-soprano & piano

**PROGRAMME NOTES**

Whitman, having witnessed the sexual repression of women in his era, gave voice to a woman's fantasy in a manner that could be described as tasteful erotica. The composer worked on the song while living in Hong Kong during the autumn of 1995 shortly before the hand over of the territory to mainland China, the humid, tropical air contributing to the composer's response to the exotic nature of the text; the piano part, at times, can be a bit wild and at other times there is just a hint of a sultry tango.

*THE TWENTY-NINTH BATHER*

*Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,  
Twenty-eight young men, and all so friendly,  
Twenty-eight years of womanly life, and all so lonesome.*

*She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,  
She hides handsome and richly dressed aft the blinds of the window.*

*Which of the young men does she like best?  
Ah, the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.*

*Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,  
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.*

*Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.*

*The beards of the young men glister'd with wet,  
it ran from their long hair, little streams passed all over their bodies.*

*An unseen hand also passed over their bodies,  
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.*

*The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun....  
they do not ask who seizes fast to them,  
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and bending arch,  
They do not think whom they scuse with spray.*

*Walt Whitman*

The Twenty-Ninth Bather was composed in autumn 1995, in the tropical surroundings of Hong Kong. The song was premièred on 21 October 1996 by Naomi Itami and the composer, at a Guildford Book Festival concert called *Seasons of Change*