

**William Grosvenor Neil**

# **From a Litany**

*for soprano, alto saxophone, and guitar*

*text by Mark Strand*

**(2023)**



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## From a Litany by Mark Strand

(There in an open field I lie down in a hole I once dug and I  
praise the sky.)

I praise the clouds that are like lungs of light.  
I praise the owl that wants to inhabit me and the hawk that  
does not.  
I praise the mouse's fury, the wolf's consideration.  
I praise the dog that live in the household of people and  
shall never be one of them.  
I praise the whale that lives under the the cold blankets of salt.  
I praise the formations of squid, the domes of meandra.  
I praise the secrecy of doors, the openness of windows.  
I praise the depth of closets.  
I praise the wind, the rising generations of air.  
I praise the trees on whose brances shall sit the Cock of  
Portugal and the Polish Cock.  
I praise the palm trees of Rio and those that shall grow in  
London.  
I praise the gardeners, the worms and the small plants that  
praise each other.  
I praise the sweet berries of Georgetown, Maine and the  
song of the white-throated sparrow.  
I praise the poets of Waverly Place and Eleventh Street, and  
the one whose bones turn to dark emeralds when he  
stands upright in the wind.  
I praise the clocks for which I grow old in a day and young  
in a day.  
I praise all manner of shade, that which I see and that which  
I do not.  
I praise all roofs from the watery roof of the pond to the  
slate roof of the customs house.  
I praise those who ha e made of their bodies final embassies  
of flesh.  
I praise the failure of those with ambition, the authors of  
leafltes and notebooks of nothing.  
I praise the moon for suffering men.  
I praise the sun its tributes.  
I praise the pain of revival and the bliss of decline.  
I praise all for nothing because there is no price.  
I praiase myself for the way I have with a shovel and I praise  
the shovel.  
I praise the motive of praise by which I shall be reborn.  
I praise the morning whose sun is upon me.  
I praise the evening whose son I am.

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## Commissioned by Robert and Mindy Nathanson

I met Mark Strand at the American Academy in Rome when I was a fellow in composition. I got to know the man before the poetry, his direct, observant, and concise articulation seasoning our conversations at the Academy evening communal meals. During this time, while he was poet-in-residence, he gave several talks where he read his poignant and revelatory prose and poetry. After hearing him, I knew then that I would be interested in setting his poetry. Many years later, when we met again when he was teaching at the University of Chicago, I made my interest known to him and our collaboration began. I first set his *Seven Poems* for piano and digital acoustics that included his recitation of the poem. While in the process of setting that poem, guitarist Rob Nathanson and soprano, Nancy King heard an excerpt and immediately commissioned a version for soprano and guitar. So, I have Mark Strand to thank for the beginning of my 17 years of knowing Rob and Nancy and composing music for them and saxophonist, Laurent Estoppey. Indeed this trio is the instrumentation that I composed for in this latest commission by Rob setting Strand's poem, *From a Litany*. The poem alludes to the liturgical prayer consisting of a series of petitions. In this poem, Strand offers praise to a secular, sensorial world of personal observations and memories that have enriched his life. He begins with a broad appreciation of the natural world around him, and with each repetition of "I praise" the emotion intensifies and turns increasingly inwards reaching a full state of catharsis in the final lines. I set the text with the power of Strand's recitation in my ears; his allusions and ironic juxtapositions inform the color and lyricism of my music. WGN

Duration: 8:20

Score is transposed.

# From a Litany

dedicated to Trio Sureño

Mark Strand

William Grosvenor Neil

$\text{♩} = 60$

Soprano

Alto Saxophone

Guitar

$\text{♩} = 60$

3

S.

I praise \_\_\_\_\_ the clouds that are like

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

XII XII

XII

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6 *f* *mp*

S. lungs of light. I praise the

Alto Sax. *mp* *p*

Gtr. *f* *p* VII

9

S. ow - l that wants to in -

Alto Sax.

Gtr. XII ⑤ ④ ③ XII ④

11 *mf* *pp*

S. ha - bit me and the hawk that does

Alto Sax. *mp* *p* *pp* ① VII ② ③ ④

Gtr. *mf* *pp*

15 A

S. *p* not. I praise the mous-e's fu-ry, the wolf's con-sid - er - a - tion.

Alto Sax. *p*

Gtr. <sup>XII</sup> ⑤ A *p*

19

S. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* I praise the dog that lives in the house-hold of peo - ple and

Alto Sax.

Gtr. *simile* ②

21 *f* *p* *mf*

S. *3* *3* shall ne-ver be one of them. I praise the whale that

Alto Sax. *mf* *3* *3* *3* *3* *p*

Gtr. *f* *p* *mf* *3* *3*

24

S. *p* *simile* *pp*

lives un-der the cold blan-ket of salt. I praise the for -

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

26

S. *p*

ma-tions of squid, the domes of me-an-dra. I praise the

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

28

S. *mf* *rit.* **B** *a tempo* *p*

se-cre-cy of doors, the o-pen-ness of win-dows. I praise the depth of clos-ets.

Alto Sax. *rit.* *a tempo* *pp* *f* *p* *pp*

Gtr. *rit.* **B** *a tempo* *f*

31

S. *mf* I praise the wind, the ris - ing

Alto Sax. *p*

Gtr. *mf*

34

S. gen - er - a - tions of air. I

Alto Sax. *simile*

Gtr. *f*

36

S. *f* praise the trees I praise I praise the trees

Alto Sax. *mf*

Gtr.

39 **C** *mp* *mf* *3* *3*

S. on whose bran-ches shall sit the Cock of Por-tu-gal the

Alto Sax. *3*

Gtr. **C** *mp* *mf* *3*

41 *3* *f*

S. Po-lish Cock I praise the palm trees of Ri - o and

Alto Sax. *f* *3*

Gtr. *f*

43 **D** *♩=96* Più mosso *mp*

S. those that shall grow in Lon-don. I praise the gard-en-ers,

Alto Sax. *mp*

Gtr. *♩=96* Più mosso **D** *mp*

46

S. I praise the worms and the small plants that praise each

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

50

S. o - ther. I praise I praise

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

XII  
②  
④  
○

54

S. I praise the small plants that praise each o - ther I praise

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

*ritardano* *meno mosso* **mp** ♩=60 **E**

*ritardano* *meno mosso* **mp** ♩=60 **E** *meno mosso* **mp**

This musical score is for the song "The Sweetest Thing" and is arranged for Soprano (S.), Alto Saxophone (Alto Sax.), and Guitar (Gtr.). The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (58, 64, and 68).

**System 1 (Measures 58-63):**

- Soprano:** Measures 58-63. Dynamics: *p* (measures 58-60), *f* (measure 61), *mp* (measures 62-63). Lyrics: "I praise\_\_\_\_\_".
- Alto Sax:** Measures 58-63. Melodic line with slurs.
- Guitar:** Measures 58-63. Chordal accompaniment. Dynamics: *mf* (measures 61-62), *mp* (measures 62-63).

**System 2 (Measures 64-67):**

- Soprano:** Measures 64-67. Dynamics: *f* (measures 64-65), *p* (measures 66-67). Lyrics: "I praise\_\_\_\_\_ I praise\_\_\_\_\_". A fermata is placed over the final note of measure 67.
- Alto Sax:** Measures 64-67. Melodic line with slurs.
- Guitar:** Measures 64-67. Chordal accompaniment. Dynamics: *f* (measures 64-65), *p* (measures 66-67). A fermata is placed over the final note of measure 67.

**System 3 (Measures 68-71):**

- Soprano:** Measures 68-71. Dynamics: *f* (measures 68-69), *mp* (measures 70-71). Lyrics: "ber-ries of George-town Maine and the song\_\_\_\_\_".
- Alto Sax:** Measures 68-71. Melodic line with slurs.
- Guitar:** Measures 68-71. Chordal accompaniment. Dynamics: *mp* (measures 68-69), *f* (measures 70-71).

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings (*p*, *f*, *mp*, *mf*) to guide the performers. The lyrics are written below the Soprano staff.

70

S. *mf* **G** of the white-throat-ed spar - row I praise the po - ets of

Alto Sax. *mf* *mp* *p*

Gtr. *mf* **G** *mp* *p*

72

S. Wav-er-ly place and E - le-venth Street, and the one whose bones turn to dark

Alto Sax. *mp*

Gtr. *f*

74

S. *p* *f* *3* *pausa* *mf* em' - ralds when he stands up - right in the

Alto Sax. *pausa* *p*

Gtr. *pausa* *p* *f*

75

S. wind.

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

*mp* 6

10

76

S. *ff*

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

10

77

S. *mf* *p*

Alto Sax. *f* *p* *pp*

Gtr. 10 *p* VII

[illegible]

87 *f*

S. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

praise all roofs from the wa-ter-y roof of the pond to the slate roof of the cus-toms

Alto Sax. *3* *3* *3*

Gtr. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

89

S. *3* *3*

house. I praise those who have made\_\_\_\_\_ of their

Alto Sax. *3* *mf* *3* *3*

Gtr. *3* *f* *3* *3*

91 *ff*

S. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

bo-dies fi - nal em-bass-ies of flesh. I praise the fail - ure

Alto Sax. *3* *p* *3*

Gtr. *3* *3* *3* *3* *ff* *similie*

94

S.

of those with am bi - tion the au-thors of leaf-lets and note-books of

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

96

*p*

Meno mosso ♩ = 60

S.

no - thing. I praise the

Alto Sax.

*p*

Meno mosso ♩ = 60

Gtr.

*p*

99

S.

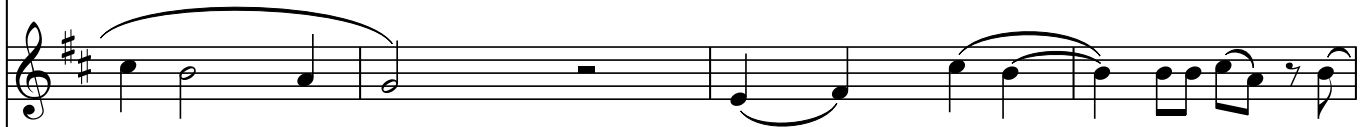
moon for suf-fer-ing men. I praise the sun its tri - butes.

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

102

S.  I praise the pain of re - vi-val and the bliss of de cline.

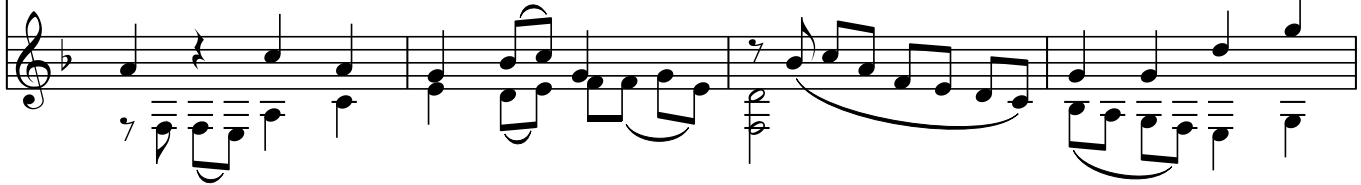
Alto Sax. 

Gtr. 

106 *mf* *f*

S.  I praise all for no - thing be - cause there is no

Alto Sax. 

Gtr. 

*mf* *mp*

110 *f* *mf*

S.  price. \_\_\_\_\_

Alto Sax. 

Gtr. 

*f* *mf*

*♩* = 92 **K** Più mosso

*♩* = 92 **K** Più mosso

114 *mf*

S. *I praise my - self for the way I have with a sho-vel and I*

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

117

S. *praise the sho - vel. I praise the mo-tive of praise by which I*

Alto Sax.

Gtr. *f*

121 *f* *mf* *f* *rall.*

S. *shall be re - born. I praise the morn - ing whose sun\_*

Alto Sax. *mf* *p* *mp* *rall.*

Gtr. *mf* *f*

126

***ff*** ***f*** ***pp*** **L**

S. is u - pon \_\_\_\_\_ me. I praise the ev' -

Alto Sax. ***f*** ***mf*** ***pp*** **L** **VII** **XII** **VII**

Gtr. ***pp*** **L** **VII** **XII** **VII**

132

S. ning whose son \_\_\_\_\_ I

Alto Sax.

Gtr.

137

***p*** **rit.** ***ppp***

S. am. \_\_\_\_\_

Alto Sax. ***p*** **VII** ***pp***

Gtr. ***p*** **rit.** ***pp***

# Alto Saxophone

# From a Litany

Mark Strand

dedicated to Trio Sureño

William Grosvenor Neil

⑤ ② ♩ = 60

*p* *<mf>* *>pp* *<mp*

6

*mp* *p* *mp* *>p* *pp*

14

A

*p*

20

*mf* *p*

24

rit.

*p* *pp* *pp*

29

B

a tempo

*f* *p* *pp*

## Alto Saxophone

31

*p*

35

*mf*

XII

39

*>mp* *mf*

44

*mp*

51

*ritardano*

57

*meno mosso*

*mf* *mp*

64 F

*f* *p* *mp* *p* *mf*

70 G *mf* *pausa*

*p* *mp* *p*

75

*mp* *f* *p* *pp*

78 H

*p*

Più mosso

83 I ♩=80

*mp*

87

*mf*

90

*p*

93

*p*

Meno mosso

97 ♩ = 60

*p*

102

108

*mf* *mp*

Più mosso

113 ♩ = 92

118

*f* *mf*

123 *rall.*

*p* *mp* *f* *mf*

*un poco meno mosso*

129

*pp*

136 *rit.*

*p* *pp*

dedicated to Trio Sureño

# From a Litany

Guitar

Mark Strand

William Grosvenor Neil

♩ = 60

⑤ ②

*p*

*mf*

*p*

V ⑤

4

XII XII ④ ⑤ ② ①

*f*

VII

*p*

8

XII ⑤ ④ ③

XII ④

11

① VII ② ⑥

*mf*

*pp*

*p*

16 [A]

*simile*

②

21

*f*

*p*

*mf*

3 3

24

*simile*

*rit.*

29 [B]

*a tempo*

*f*

31 *mf*

34 *simile* *f*

XII ① ② ③

39 **C** *f*

43 *mp*

**D** ♩ = 96

*Più mosso*

48

XII ② ④

54 *ritardano* *meno* *mp*

**E** ♩ = 60

Guitar

VII  
④  
⑤

3

61

*f* *p*

67 F

*mf* *p* *f*

70 G

*mp* *p* *f*

74 *pausa*

*p* *f*

76

*p* *f*

77

*p* *f*

VII  
⑤

4

Guitar

79 H

*f* *p*

83 I  $\text{♩} = 80$

*f*

86

*f*

90 *similie*

*ff*

Meno mosso

95 J  $\text{♩} = 60$

*p*

100

*p*

105

*p*

109

*f*

112

**K** Più mosso  
♩ = 92

*mf*

117

*f*

122

rall. . . . .

*mf* *f*

un poco meno mosso

129

**L** VII XII VII

*pp*

137

rit.

VII

*p* *pp*