

Program II
PAEAN TO PLACE - NATURE IN POETRY & MUSIC
Tuesday August 25

4:00 FORUM FINDING LORINE NIEDECKER. A conversation with biographer Margot Peters and composer John Harbison that explore the poetry of “Wisconsin’s Emily Dickinson” and its musical settings. Lorine Niedecker joins us from afar.

6:00 PICNIC The conversation continues over light summer fare at the festival farm

7:30 RECITAL LONGING FOR PLACE. Pianist Ryan McCullough returns with soprano Lucy Fitz Gibbons in an evocative program of nature-inspired works.

PURCELL *O Solitude*, Z. 406
ATHENS *Five Poems of Sara Teasdale* (2014; North American premiere)
SAARIAHO *Lonh* (1996)
VINES *Uncanny Valley* (2011)
HARBISON *Seven Poems of Lorine Niedecker* (2014; Midwest premiere)
SCHUMANN *Myrthen*, Op. 25 (selections)

Commentary: Margot Peters | Ann Engelman | John Harbison
Lucy Fitz Gibbons, soprano | Ryan McCullough, piano

For our second complex of events we move mainly to the present and the recent past, in celebration of one of Wisconsin’s most important artists, the poet Lorine Niedecker. Many poets of the 20th century have worked in what is broadly known as the Imagist mode, short lines, brief phrases, elusively stated thoughts. At its most eloquent it can give us the great range and imagination of William Carlos Williams, as well as decades of other very convincingly compressed writers from Emily Dickinson through to Gary Snyder. But many recent poems of the minimal sort seem thin and arch, a product less of economy than of fatigue.

In Lorine Niedecker we feel the pressure of what has been left out, the hard journey to final shape. We imply the “story” behind each poem, and marvel at the courage and art that sets it down so briefly. We can also admire the persistence that drove her to continue to write all through her life with little coming back in terms of support and recognition. —And not even the compensation of Emily Dickinson’s genteel upper middle class life style: Niedecker cleaned hospital rooms in the latter part of her life, and hung barely above the poverty level throughout.

Ryan McCullough and Lucy Fitz Gibbon are two outstanding performers who have made the best decision about forming a repertoire. They represent their own generation, searching for what is best and most characteristic in the work of their time. In 2015 our relationship to the natural world is even more fragile and elusive than it was to Sara Teasdale and Lorine Niedecker. Still artists seek to frame that relationship, and render it with their new developing languages — a form of conservation? Or, more dangerously, more urgently—nostalgia?

—John Harbison