

## Wren's Cabaret Gift Liner Notes

**Wild Geese.** This poem came at the right moment in my life. After surviving a terribly abusive mother, I had a constant cacophony of critical voices in my head. One of my greatest life achievements (with Daena's help) is that I silenced that inner critic voice significantly and when it arises, I know how to give it a pacifier, cover it with a blanket and put it in the back seat, so I can drive. It has been part of my life's work to help others do the same.

**Unexpected Song** is by Andrew Lloyd Weber and was in his musical, "Song and Dance." Janet Hood played piano, Richard Gates was on bass, and Cerci Miller played flute. This song is for Daena. It's our song. It encapsulates how much I love her and how unexpected it was for me to find someone who could fill my empty spaces with gorgeous love. I remember one time on a hike along the Rio Grande Gorge in New Mexico, I sang this song to her with the wide blue sky as a witness. Our eyes locked, tears flowed and we felt the song resonate deeply within our souls.

**It Had to Be Ewe.** It is no secret that I am a passionate knitter. I love to work with fiber—it's a gratifying and meditative experience for me. When we lived in Taos, New Mexico, I was invited to sing folk songs at the annual "Taos Wool Festival." I wanted to sing songs about fiber and knitting, so I rewrote lyrics to well known tunes. My songs depict the tragedies and triumphs unique to knitting and fiber. Eventually, I recorded a popular CD for knitters called, "*Wren's Greatest Knits!*" and I developed a performance, "*Singing with Every Fiber!*" which I performed all over the USA. This song, *It Had to Be Ewe* was my first song of fiber. John Curtis (formerly of Pousette Dart Band) is on the guitar and Daena is on percussion.

**Friling/Springtime.** In 1999, I felt a profound calling to research music of the Holocaust. This song was my first exploration of this amazing bounty of beauty that came from the ashes of genocide. *Friling (Springtime)* was written in the Vilna Ghetto, which produced more than 240 cultural events during the horror of the Nazi occupation. Art and Music became Spiritual Resistance. I went on to learn hundreds of songs and performed them at many Yom Hashoah events across the country. I am playing the guitar.

Here is a translation of the Yiddish:

*Friling/Springtime*

By Shmerke Kaczerginski

I wander the Ghetto  
From alley to alley  
Useless, no comfort I find.  
Gone my beloved, Oh, how can I bear it?  
Won't somebody say something kind?  
My house is aglow now,  
The sky so much bluer, but after it's all said and done,

I stand like a beggar  
Before every doorway  
And beg for a handful of sun.

Refrain:

Springtime, please take my sorrow  
And bring my loved one  
My dear one to me  
Springtime, on blue wings soaring  
My heart flies with you  
And seeks its destiny.

This year the springtime  
Is with us so early.  
My longing for you burst in bloom.  
I see you—in my mind  
All covered with flowers.  
With gladness you'll come to me soon.  
The sun has now showered the garden with sunshine  
The earth is all covered in green.  
My darling, my loved one, are you lost for all time?  
My mind cannot bear what that means.

***The Journey.*** In January 2016, I had a grand mal seizure or “Catastrophic Neurological Event” from a rare sensitivity to Cytoxan chemotherapy and I spent five days in the ICU. I had trouble focusing on anything when I came home. All I was able to do was read one Mary Oliver poem a day. This poem gave me strength and purpose.

***My Brother Lived in San Francisco.*** I love this song. Janet Hood and Bill Russell wrote it for a musical called: “*Elegies for Angels, Punks and Raging Queens.*” It was a vibrant show about the AIDS epidemic of the 80’s.

I had the privilege of having Janet Hood as my pianist and Richard Gates on bass. Daena did wonderful musical direction. Recording this special song at the world class Blue Jay recording studio was one of the thrilling moments of my life.

**Erev Shel Shoshanim.** This is a Hebrew love song. Doug Hammer played keyboard and Daena played the drums and shakers. I love to sing this song because it's so sensual and so beautiful.

Here is the translation:

Evening of roses  
Let us go out to the grove  
Myrrh, perfumes, and frankincense  
Is the carpet under your feet

Night falls slowly  
And a wind of rose blows  
Let me whisper a song for you slowly  
A song of love

Dawn and the dove coos  
Your hair is full of dewdrops  
Your lips are as roses unto the morning  
I will pick them for myself

**Tell Me on a Sunday.** Another song by Andrew Lloyd Weber. Janet Hood played piano. Daena did poignant musical arrangement. I recorded this at Soundtrack Recording studio. What was memorable (and symbolic) about that session is that I recorded the phrase "*Take the hurt out of all the pain*" repeatedly until I was happy with it.

**I Will Knit for You.** My knitting songs were always based on real dilemmas: How to deal with mistakes (knitter's truth: "As you knit, so shall you rip"), how to get out of tangles, how to begin and how to end. These are profound metaphors and lessons and are, honestly, funny situations. Screaming and cursing while ripping out a week's worth of knitting is tragic and comic. I rewrote the lyrics to this popular song while hiking up a mountain in New Mexico. I think I wrote the lyrics on the back of a label from a water bottle. Alizon Lissance played the accordion and John Curtis is on guitar and mandolin.

**Ghost in This House.** This is a haunting and powerful song by Hugh Prestwood. Daena wanted to strip it down so that you can imagine the creaking of steps and the echo of loneliness in an empty house. I must say, I love the result. Doug Hammer played keyboard.

**For Strong Women – a poem by Marge Piercy.** This poem was the cornerstone of a one woman show I created and performed, called "A Strong Woman is..." In 1979, I created a successful women's theater group called "The Muse," which performed many brilliant, diverse, and unknown writings of American woman. We got a large grant to perform these shows at theaters, senior centers, libraries and Framingham women's prison. It was a memorable and life changing experience for everyone involved. Marge Piercy's only requirement for giving me permission to perform her magnificent poem was that I send her books of cat stickers.

**Wild Things.** Feminist songwriter Chris Williamson wrote this song. What a primal joy to record it with Cercie Miller on saxophone, Janet Hood on piano, and Richard Gates on bass.

**Old Friend** is written by Nancy Ford and Gretchen Cryer for the musical, "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road." This song was my soundtrack BEFORE I met Daena. It made me cry to sing it and I loved to sing it. "Love is rare. Life is strange. Nothing lasts. People change." Janet Hood is on the piano and Richard Gates on bass.

**76 Stitches.** This song is one of my greatest "Greatest Knits" accomplishments because the lyrics are directions for a real hat pattern that many people around the world have followed to make cute hats. The knitting magazine *Interweave Knits* published my lyrics and I wrote out a more detailed hat pattern. Alizon Lissance is on keyboards. Daena is on snare drum.

**Papirossen/Motherless Child.** Papirossen is a ghetto song written in the 1930's about an orphan selling cigarettes on the street. It's a tragic story. I felt that it would pair well with the suffering of the African-American song, "Motherless Child" both musically and thematically. Two cultures that have been persecuted and sadly pitted against each other at times. I wanted to fuse the music together to illuminate the commonality we share. Alizon Lissance is on piano and John Curtis is on guitar.

### *Cigarettes (Papirossen)*

The night is cold, and all around is dark;  
A boy stands there and looks around;  
Only a wall protects him from the rain.  
In his hand is a little tray,  
And his eyes beckon everyone who goes by.

I no longer have the strength left  
To walk about the streets;  
I'm hungry, disheveled and wet from the rain.  
I shlep around from the day's beginning;  
Nobody wants to do business with me.  
They all laugh and make fun of me

Come buy some cigarettes!  
They're dry, the rain did not get to them.  
They're real cheap, it's true;  
Buy them and have pity on me;  
Save me from hunger...  
Come buy these matches, the best of any,  
And you'll help a poor orphan.  
Forgive me my shouting and rambling;  
Nobody buys anything from me,  
And so I'll perish like a dog.

My father lost his hands in the war;  
My mother couldn't bear it anymore;  
She went to her grave still young  
And I was left in this world,  
Alone and unhappy like a stone.  
I gather up crumbs in the cold marketplace;  
My bed is a hard bench in the cold park;  
The police beat me with their sticks  
And do not heed my cries.

I had a little sister, a child of nature she was;  
We were always together, traveling for a whole year.  
With her I was happy, and when I could look at her,  
It was easier to bear hunger and my troubles.  
Then she grew weak and ill  
And she died in my arms on a street bench.  
When I lost her, I lost everything.  
May death soon take me too.

***Richland Woman.*** I think my ex-husband, Will LeBow, introduced me to this song by Mississippi John Hurt. It's a fun song to sing. Richard Gates is on bass and Janet Hood rocks the piano.

***Holly Ann.*** Judy Collins wrote this song. I love that it is about weaving, spinning, sisters (I never had one), and San Francisco. I was born in San Francisco. John Curtis created a beautiful accompaniment that embodies in music the weaving and spinning. Singing this song at fiber festivals and knitting guilds always made me high.

***Dremlyn Feygl (Sleeping Birds).*** This is one of the most poignant songs of the Holocaust. There was a mass murder of Jews in the forest of Ponar, just outside of Vilna, and miraculously, a little child was able to escape. This song was written by Leah Rudnitzky and Leyb Yampolski as a lullaby to that child. I am accompanying myself on guitar.

***El Condor Pasa.*** I first heard this song on a Simon and Garfunkel album. Years later, I loved to listen to the Peruvian street performers play it on hot nights in Harvard Square. Daena is on drums and percussion and Doug Hammer is on keyboard.

***A Thousand Kisses Deep.*** When I was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer in August of 2018, I turned to Leonard Cohen's music to calm my terror. This song was a refuge. During that terrible time, I found much needed solace in creating many private concerts for Daena at home that included many Leonard Cohen songs, spirituals and songs about hope. Then, on a cold night in December, I recorded some of those songs with Kevin at Soundtrack Recording studio. Daena was present as my support and the experience was comforting and meaningful.

**The Summer's Day.** Another favorite Mary Oliver poem. After spending beautiful days in New Mexico doing nothing but watching the light change, I find solace in:

*I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?*

**To Life! Medley.** I toured many Jewish homes and assisted living facilities doing concerts of songs in English, Hebrew, Ladino, and Yiddish. It was a thoroughly life enriching experience for all of us! What fun. This is a medley I put together of the well-known song from *Fiddler on the Roof*, "**To Life!**" as well as a Russian song called, "**L'Chaim!**" and the Hebrew Song, "**Yismechu Hashamayim**" which means, "Let the Heavens Be Glad." John Curtis plays the guitar and Alizon Lissance plays the accordion. Pure joy!!

**Wall Around Your Heart.** I always loved to sing this song by Mary Chapin Carpenter. It made me cry so I knew it was a good song. In Taos, I would take my guitar into the backyard among the sage, pinion and cedar trees and sing to the canyon. I sang it at a town gathering that Daena and I produced on the first anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>. I knew a producer on the second plane to hit the trade center tower, and I didn't want to watch the coverage of the first anniversary on TV. So, Daena and I organized an amazing event bringing the town together: We invited a Native American flute player from the Pueblo, a Mariachi band, the Fire Chief played the bagpipes ( Amazing Grace), the Mayor spoke as well as a Rabbi and a Buddhist monk, the legendary Frank Morgan played his trumpet, a rap poet from the Pueblo performed, as well as a Native American survivor from the WWII Bataan Death march, a National Guard member and a peace activist from " Not in My Name." A young boy in fourth grade told the story of his uncle's survival from the trade center tower and a waitress from the local diner shared her moving story about how her son survived the ordeal in the other tower. My knitting group sat on stage the entire time spinning and knitting to symbolize all of our stories that are so important and the thread of life. A local artist created a wall as a set and everyone in the town wrote personal messages on the wall. Daena gave two beautiful monologues about how our lives are interwoven together with stories, and I sang "*Wall Around Your Heart.*" And to add to the synchronicity, a retired man who was travelling through town, happened to come to the event and he filmed it. Oh, and we also raised a few thousand dollars for the local fire department. It was one of the most meaningful accomplishments of my life and Daena's. This is one of the songs I recorded with Kevin and Daena after I learned that the cancer had metastasized. Singing and playing the guitar gave me comfort that I wish for you.

**Throw it Away.** The great Abbey Lincoln wrote this song. It plays in my head often and I love the lyrics:

*Give your love, live your life  
Each and every day*

After my initial diagnosis in 2015, I vowed to “Life Out Loud” and enjoy every moment. I began to find enormous satisfaction, delight and peace in simply living each day. This is another song I recorded that special December night with Kevin and Daena. I am accompanying myself on guitar.

**Invocation (Sabbath Prayer).** It was an early August morning in Taos. There was silence except for an occasional coyote cry. The sun was coming up and making the waterfalls on the highest mountain in the area, Wheeler Peak, shimmer like diamonds in the distance. The air was cool and I could smell the sage after the night’s rain. I’m sure our black cat Molly was keeping me company. I was inspired to rewrite the lyrics to “Sabbath Prayer,” which is a lovely melody from “Fiddler on the Roof,” but I found the lyrics too patriarchal. I was pleased with the results and ended all my concerts with this song, which I renamed “Invocation.” I wish you all the blessings in this song. “You deserve it all. You’re beautiful and true. Oh, hear our prayer, our prayer. Amen.”

*Invocation*

May the light protect and defend you.  
May you be inspired and at peace.  
May you walk a path that fills your life with truth and grace.

May you find fulfillment of purpose.  
May your vision be realized.  
May you come to find much beauty in the earth and skies.

May great love fill the rooms of your heart.  
May your spirit soar high through your art.

May you feel alive every moment.  
And if there are times when you ache...  
May there be a way to focus and to stay awake.

May you find laughter and lightness.  
May your days be filled with surprise.  
May you see your strength reflected in your best friend’s eyes.

May you travel, the depths and the heights.  
May life bless you and bring you delight.

May the light protect and defend you.  
May you be inspired and at peace.

You deserve it all.

You're beautiful and true.

Oh, hear our prayer, our prayer.

Amen.