

# Sleep Song

Ann Silsbee

high voice, piano



Elizabeth Alexander

*Seafarer Press*

## Sleep Song

What I love is to slip late at night  
into David's room gaze secretly  
down at the soft mask of sleep twitching  
with no flush of rage no pout no glee  
just the passing in and out of breath  
delicately stirring his body  
into a hint of motion by which  
I know David is living within  
safe to love with my whole watching self

Ann Silsbee

© 2002 by Ann L. Silsbee From *Naming the Disappeared*, published by Vista Periodista, Ithaca, NY  
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**Composer Note:** Ann Silsbee's chapbook *Naming the Disappeared* explores a small and unusual poetic form: nine lines of nine syllables each. "Sleep Song" captured my imagination immediately with this intimate image: "just the passing in and out of breath." How might the peaceful breath of sleep be translated into music, along with a mother's vulnerability, thoughtfulness, and love?



**Cover Image:** "Sweet Sleep," by Janet Lavida.-

The artist writes: "I was born in the Chicago suburbs and lived there for the better part of my life. My love for art began in those formative years. No doubt the influence of my mother, having been an artist herself, was the stepping stone that enhanced my love to become a giver."

Lavida lives Harper Woods, Michigan, where she works in oil painting and pencil drawing.  
[fineartamerica.com/profiles/janet-lavida/shop](http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/janet-lavida/shop)

**Composer's Note about the poet:** As a graduate student in music composition at Cornell University, I was only vaguely aware of Ann Silsbee, the first woman to receive a doctorate in my program. A longtime resident of Ithaca, New York, she still lived in town, and I occasionally saw her at concerts, lectures, and other events. While I was eager to know other women in what was then still a male-dominated field, our thirty-year age difference always seemed an obstacle to deeper friendship.

It wasn't until I moved back to Ithaca five years after receiving my own doctorate that I began to get to know Ann. By that time I was loving every minute of being the mother of two preschool boys but struggling mightily to figure out who I was as a composer. Meanwhile Ann had turned her creativity towards poetry, writing exquisitely crafted pieces on themes of nature, family and memory. She became not only a supportive colleague but also a trusted friend. As the mother of two sons herself, she understood well the challenges of balancing work and family.

A lover of beauty in all forms, she served me many delicious lunches at her home, thoughtfully arranging the portions on each plate. Afterwards she often read a poem she was working on. She was always thoughtful, honest, and deeply kind. I am glad to have had her as a friend.

Poet, composer and pianist **Ann Loomis Silsbee** (1930-2003) was the first woman to receive a doctoral degree in music composition from Cornell University. She went on to write over fifty works for solo, chamber, orchestral and operatic forces, some of which were recorded on CRI, Northeastern and Spectrum. She devoted her later creative years to poetry, which appeared in publications such as *Seneca Review*, *Atlanta Review* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, as well as in the chapbook, *Naming The Disappeared*. Her first book-length poetry collection, *Orioling*, received the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award. It was published by Red Hen Press in 2003, shortly before a sudden recurrence of cancer led to Ann's death. Later that same year her second book, *The Book of Ga*, was published by CustomWords.



# Sleep Song

Ann Silsbee

for high voice and piano

Elizabeth Alexander

(♩ = 76-84) Gently rocking

*p*  
Led.

5

*p*  
What I  
Led.

9

love,  
Led.

13

What I love,  
Led. Led.

17

What I

Ped.

21

love is to slip late at night in - to

*mp*

Ped. Ped.

25

Da - vid's room,

*mp playfully*

29

**senza misura**

*p* warmly, sung all to yourself

What I love

Ped.

32 **a tempo**

is to

36

gaze se - cret - ly down, se - cret - ly, se - cret - ly

*Ped.*

39

down,

*murmuring*

43

down at the

*Ped.*

47

soft mask of sleep \_\_\_\_\_

*gently*

Ped.

51

twitch - ing with no flush \_\_\_\_\_ of

Ped.

55

*mp*

rage, \_\_\_\_\_ twitch - ing with

*mp*

Ped.

59

no pout, \_\_\_\_\_ no

Ped.

63 *mf*

glee,

*mf*

Ped.

67 *mp* wholeheartedly

just the

*mp*

71

pass - ing in and

75

out of breath, just the

Ped.

79

pass - ing in \_\_\_\_\_ and

*mf*

This system contains measures 79-82. The vocal line features a melodic phrase starting on a dotted quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present at the beginning of the piano part.

83

out of breath, \_\_\_\_\_

*mf*

*Red.*

This system contains measures 83-86. The vocal line continues with a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment features a more active eighth-note pattern. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present. The instruction *Red.* is written below the piano part.

87

de - li - cate - ly stir - ring, \_\_\_\_\_

*p*

*p*

This system contains measures 87-90. The vocal line has a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern. Dynamic markings of *p* are present in both the vocal and piano parts.

91

stir - ring, \_\_\_\_\_

This system contains measures 91-94. The vocal line continues with a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment remains consistent with the eighth-note pattern.

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet • Paul Adams, technological hero • Stephen Alexander, lyric consultant • Ginny Allen, Agile coach and friend • The great people at American Composers Forum • Yehuda Amichai, poet • A. R. Ammons, poet • Jennifer Anderson, conductor and composer advocate • Scott Bates, poet • Abbie Betinis, initiator of collaborative endeavors • Beth Norton, conductor and composer advocate • Dennis Blubaugh, more than just a music dealer • Michael deVernon Boblett, poet • Edna Busby, my first piano teacher • Ray Bradbury, writer • Augustin Cadena, translator • Norbert Capek, minister and advocate for religious freedom • Jessica Corbett, editor • David Cummings, poet • Philip Dacey, poet • Catherine Dalton, composer and serum partner • Emily Dickinson, poet • Evelyn Dudley, poet and caregiver • Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister and composer advocate • Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet • Louise Erdrich, writer • David Allan Evans, poet • Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer • Richard M. Fewkes, minister and writer • Pasha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Michael Hagan, founders of Graphite Marketplace • Steve Harper, just about everything • Steve Harkins, web designer • Edie Hill, composer and friend • Langston Hughes, poet • Margaret and George Heald, piano technician • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and serum partner • Ruth Palmer, conductor and composer advocate • Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet • Paul Rardin, conductor and composer advocate • Kalidasa, poet • Steve Kaul, recording engineer • Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher and poet • Dorothy Knost, piano teacher • Ben Krywosz, artistic director of Nautilus Music-Theater • Denise Levertov, poet • George Ella Lyon, poet • Jonathan Machen, vocalist • Dawna Markova, writer • Anne Matlack, conductor and composer advocate • Nancy Menk, composer advocate • Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet • Jane Ramseyer Miller, conductor, composer, social activist • Joe Mish, conductor and composer advocate • J. David Moore, composer • Gerald Rich, poet • Carl Sandburg, poet • friend • King Sigismund III, religious reformer • Ann Silsbee, composer, poet and friend • Simon Alexander-Adams, sounding board, fellow creative, and awesome son • Steven Stucky, composer and teacher • Rabindranath Tagore, poet • Sister Peronne Marie Thibert, teacher and writer • Oliver Alexander-Adams, unconventional thinker and light of my life • Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and writer • Everyone whose work supports the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries • Charles Varney, high school choral director • Anna Vonhuben, illustrator and graphic designer • Nancy White, poet • John Greenleaf Whittier, poet • Theodore Chickering Williams, poet • Daniel Winter, pianist and teacher • Nancy Wood, poet • Yehudi Wyner, composer and teacher

**A lot of hard work  
and creativity went  
into bringing this  
music to you...**



**...and some of it  
was even mine.**

**This page has been intentionally omitted.  
(You know why.) A complete perusal score may be  
purchased through any music store or dealer.**

*Elizabeth Alexander*

*Seafarer Press*

The Music of Elizabeth Alexander

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

117

I know Da - vid is liv - ing, liv - ing with -

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

123

in, safe to love

Ped. Ped. Ped.

129

with my whole watch - - ing

Ped.

134

self

*pp*

Ped.

# Vocal Music by Elizabeth Alexander

**A Garret of Old Playthings** (Carl Sandburg)  
high voice, piano

**A Love Like That** (Hafiz/Ladinsky)  
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

**Conversation on a Train** (Elizabeth Alexander)  
*Duet:* low voice & medium voice, piano

**Die Gedanken Sind Frei** (German protest song, arr. Alexander)  
*Duet:* low voice & high voice / 2 medium voices, piano

**Grace** (Elizabeth Alexander)  
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

**I Write This Poem Out of Darkness** (George Ella Lyon)  
*Trio:* low, medium & high voices, flute, violin, piano

**I'll Tell You a Story, then...** (Nancy White)  
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

**Infant Holy, Infant Lowly** (Polish carol, arr. Alexander)  
*Trio:* low, medium & high voices *a cappella*

**Jo!** (The Edict of Torda)  
*Trio:* low, medium & high voices *a cappella*

**My Aunt Gives Me a Clarinet Lesson** (Gregory Djanikian)  
soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, percussion

**No One Gets a Program** (Dutch proverb, Elizabeth Alexander)  
*Duet:* low voice & medium voice, piano

**No Ordinary Song** (Elizabeth Alexander)  
medium voice, piano

**Oath Taking** (Opal Palmer Adisa)  
high voice, piano

**On the Edge of the Water** (Elizabeth Alexander)  
low voice, piano

**Sleep Song** (Ann Silsbee)  
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

**The Eternal One** (Ralph Waldo Emerson)  
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

**The Gospel Isn't Written in the Bible Alone** (Elizabeth Alexander)  
low voice / medium- high voice, piano

**Trouble in a Minnesota Town** (Neal Bowers)  
medium voice / high voice, piano

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