Perplexed Music June 2nd and 3rd, 2018

Prologue:

David Harris Sonnet

Perplexed Music John Muehleisen

Stanza One:

Five Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay Mark Lanz Weiser

I. Into the golden vessel of great song

El sol* Adrienne Inglis (ASCAP)

Tu Voz Shawn Kirchner

Stanza Two:

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II. Sweet sounds, oh, beautiful music

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III. I, being born a woman

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> 1. I dwelled in hell....

Woe unto thee, Manhattan

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V. Mindful of you

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An ein goldnes Herz, das er am Halse trug

11. Die Sonette an Orpheus, XIII

Epilogue:

O. Proud Left Foot Steve Murray

*World Premiere Performance

Note from the Artistic Director



I am so very pleased you are here to experience this concert with us. The music you are about to hear is so lyrically and harmonically rich, you may need more than the running time of the performance to process it all. I've long had a geeky obsession with sonnets as a poetic form. I used to keep a book of Shakespeare's classic sonnets on my nightstand and read a few every night before going to sleep. In fairness, who is truly immune to finding themselves utterly lost in the elegant romance of the Bard's words, such as "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate," from his eighteenth sonnet? Although sonnets originated in Italy hundreds of years ago, I invite you to hear, with open ears and open minds, an array of fourteen-lined poems, from various countries of origin, set to new, sometimes surprising sounds. In this way, we can together experience a metamorphosis of something ancient into something entirely fresh. Our program's title is borrowed from John Muehlheisen's "Perplexed Music", a piece with such shocking beauty as to equal the stunning quality of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's text. Inversion

Ensemble's "in-house" composers have also outdone themselves in contributing thrilling new works, which are sure to find life well beyond this weekend's concerts. In truth, I envy you for hearing some of this music for the first time. Enjoy!

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Trevor F. Shaw Artistic Director Inversion Ensemble

Guest Conductor, Eric Johnson



Eric Johnson is an established member of the Austin choral community as a singer, conductor and composer. He attended The University of Texas at Austin where he studied Linguistics and Music Education. While a student at UT, he studied voice with the late Rose Taylor and conducting with Dr. Suzanne Pence. He was an active member of the UT Chamber Singers, the premier choral ensemble of the University, including performances at the National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association in 2009 and performances of Claudio Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610. Eric is a singer and section leader in several local and regional choral ensembles, including Chorus Austin, Texas Early Music Project, La Follia, Panoramic Voices, San Antonio Chamber Choir, Texas Bach Festival, Inversion Ensemble and Austin Cantorum. Highlights of his time with these ensembles include a performance at the National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association in 2013 with San Antonio Chamber Choir, serving as the bass soloist for Chorus Austin's production of Handel's Messiah in December of

2015, and traveling throughout Italy, the Baltics, and Scandinavia with Panoramic Voices and Chorus Austin in the summer of 2016. Eric serves as the Choir Director of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, where he conducts the Parish Choir in weekly services and special events, including recent offerings of Morten Lauridsen's Lux Aeterna and Ēriks Ešenvalds' Trinity Te Deum. He also conducts The Schola of St. Matthew's, a professional choir which has received high acclaim for its free performances during the Advent and Lenten seasons. Eric also teaches choir at Manor New Technology High School, a public STEM school of choice with a commitment to establishing a strong Fine Arts presence. When he's not teaching, conducting, singing, or dabbling in composition, Eric enjoys studying foreign languages, visiting churches of various liturgical traditions, binge watching Netflix, and (like any true Texan) eating Tex-Mex

Texts and Program Notes

Sonnet

This gorgeous ode to Shakespeare was created by combining a number of different love sonnets. It combines beautiful harmonies and recitation. Recited text by Shakespeare from Sonnets 12, 18, 29, 56, 105, 109, 128 sung text from Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1.

Text:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate.....

- Sonnet 18

When I do count the clock that tells the time, And see the brave day sunk in hideous night...

Sonnet 12

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, I all alone beweep my outcast state...

- Sonnet 29

Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said Thy edge should blunter be than appetite....

- Sonnet 56

Let not my love be called idolatry, Nor my beloved as an idol show...

Sonnet 105

O! never say that I was false of heart, Though absence seemed my flame to qualify...

- Sonnet 109

How oft when thou, my music, music play'st, Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds

- Sonnet 126

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank! Here will we sit and let the sounds of music Creep in our ears. Soft stillness and the night Become the touches of sweet harmony.

- Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1
- William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Perplexed Music

Perplexed Music was commissioned by Eric Banks and Seattle-based choral ensemble The Esoterics for a program made up entirely of musical settings of sonnets. When I read Elizabeth Barrett Browning's beautiful poem, it appealed to me immediately with its surreal images and musical references woven throughout. Ironically it did not immediately elicit a musical reaction from me, thus I was faced with something quite unfamiliar to me: a case of writer's block. It was not until a family tragedy struck that the poem resonated with me and my eyes were opened: our young niece and her husband lost their first-born child to a premature birth; he lived only five minutes. After receiving this news and allowing it to sink into our hearts, I returned to the text, and it came alive for me in a deeply poignant way. Rather than interpreting the text for the audience, I prefer to simply present the backstory and allow listeners to discover the meaning of the text for themselves, which I believe will yield a much more poignant experience of both the poem and the music.

- John Muehleisen

Text:

EXPERIENCE, like a pale musician, holds A dulcimer of patience in his hand, Whence harmonies we cannot under-stand, Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds In sad, perplexed minors. Deathly colds Fall on us while we hear and counter-mand Our sanguine heart back from the fancy-land With nightingales in visionary worlds.
We murmur,—'Where is any certaintune
Or measured music, in such notes as these?'—
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences,
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper— SWEET.

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

Five Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay

Five Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay were completed in the winter of 1996. They were premiered on April 14, 1996 by soprano Elizabeth Knauer and harpist Sonja Inglefield, on the Second Presbyterian Concert Series in Baltimore, Maryland.

Text:

Into the Golden Vessel of Great Song

Into the golden vessel of great song
Let us pour all our passion; breast to breast
Let other lovers lie, in love and rest;
Not we,—articulate, so, but with the tongue
Of all the world: the churning blood, the long
Shuddering quiet, the desperate hot palms pressed
Sharply together upon the escaping guest,
The common soul, unguarded, and grown strong.
Longing alone is singer to the lute;
Let still on nettles in the open sigh
The minstrel, that in slumber is as mute
As any man, and love be far and high,
That else forsakes the topmost branch, a fruit
Found on the ground by every passer-by.

I, Being born a Woman and Distressed

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason
Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity, —let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven

Sweet sounds, oh, beautiful music, do not cease!
Reject me not into the world again.
With you alone is excellence and peace,
Mankind made plausible, his purpose plain.
Enchanted in your air benign and shrewd,
With limbs a-sprawl and empty faces pale,
The spiteful and the stingy and the rude
Sleep like the scullions in the fairy-tale.
This moment is the best the world can give:
The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem.
Reject me not, sweet sounds; oh, let me live,
Till Doom espy my towers and scatter them,
A city spell-bound under the aging sun.
Music my rampart, and my only one.

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied Who told me time would ease me of my pain! I miss him in the weeping of the rain; I want him at the shrinking of the tide; The old snows melt from every mountain-side, And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane; But last year's bitter loving must remain Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide. There are a hundred places where I fear To go,—so with his memory they brim. And entering with relief some quiet place Where never fell his foot or shone his face I say, "There is no memory of him here!" And so stand stricken, so remembering him

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,
And all the flowers that in the springtime grow,
And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
And all the nests that the bared branches show,
And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet
Up paths that only mist and morning knew,
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—
But you were something more than young and sweet
And fair,—and the long year remembers you.

- Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

El sol [The Sun]

A setting of Sonnet XXXIII by Luis Martín de la Plaza in the style of a Venezuelan joropo For SATB chorus, harp, and Venezuelan cuatro

El sol (The Sun) by Adrienne Inglis, sets Sonnet XXXIII by Luis Martín de la Plaza to a Venezuelan joropo for SATB chorus, harp, and cuatro. Luis Martín de la Plaza (1577–1625) grew up in the small southern Spanish town of Antequera. A gifted poet as well as a priest, he wrote this Petrarchan sonnet in classical style. The octave (the first eight lines) presents a violent thunderstorm with dark clouds that hide the sun, fierce winds that fight with the sea, waves that batter the rocky coastline, and hail that blankets the fields. The sestet (the final six lines) turns the narrative to the sun's breaking through the clouds, calming the sea, hushing the wind and thunder, painting the clouds gold, and adorning the fields with fragrant flowers. One is left to wonder whose eyes are so beautiful as to make the sun's dawn envy their colors. The sonnet's rhythmic and vivid imagery lends itself to a Venezuelan joropo, a creole dance and musical style derived from Spanish, African, and indigenous sources. The SATB choral parts indulge in some cross rhythms and playful polyphony over a typical joropo rhythm on the harp and Venezuelan cuatro.

- Adrienne Inglis

Text:

Cubierto estaba el sol de un negro velo, luchaba el viento con el mar hinchado y él, en huecos peñascos quebrantado con blanca espuma salpicaba el cielo

El ronco trueno amenazaba el suelo tocaba el rayo al monte levantado y pardas nubes de granizo helado el campo cobijaban con su hielo.

Mas luego que su clara luz mostraron los bellos ojos que contento adoro y a quien el alba envidia los colores:

calmó el mar, calló el viento y se ausentaron los truenos, pintó el sol las nubes de oro, vistióse el campo de olorosas flores.

- Luis Martín de la Plaza (1577-1625)

The sun was covered with a black veil the wind fought with the swollen sea and it, broken against the hollow crags with white foam splashed the sky

The raucous thunder threatened the earth touched the high mountain with lightning and brown clouds of frozen hail blanketed the countryside with their ice.

But then the beautiful eyes that I happily adore showed their bright light and whose colors the dawn envies:

calmed the sea, hushed the wind and the thunder dissipated, the sun painted the clouds gold, the countryside was dressed in fragrant flowers.

Tu Voz

Set to a Spanish text by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, this is a dramatic love song that reflects the Spanish tradition with a colorful piano accompaniment supporting the folk-like melodies of the singers.

Text:

Cantas y a sol y a cielo con tu canto tu voz desgrana el cereal del día, hablan los pinos con su lengua verde: trinan todas las aves del invierno.

El mar llena sus sótanos de pasos, de campanas, cadenas y gemidos, tintinean metales y utensilios, suenan las ruedas de la carayana.

Pero sólo tu voz escucho y sube tu voz con vuelo y precisión de flecha, baja tu voz con gravedad de lluvia,

tu voz esparce altísimas espadas, vuelve tu voz cargada de violetas y luego me acompaña por el cielo.

- Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

You sing, and your voice peels the husk of the day's grain, your song with the sun and sky, the pine trees speak with their green tongue: all the birds of the winter whistle.

The sea fills its cellar with footfalls, with bells, chains, whimpers, the tools and the metals jangle, wheels of the caravan creak.

But I hear only your voice, your voice soars with the zing and precision of an arrow, it drops with the gravity of rain,

your voice scatters the highest swords and returns with its cargo of violets: it accompanies me through the sky.

Four Poems for Solo Flute: Sonnet

I composed Four Poems for Solo Flute at the age of 18. I was taking a poetry class at the time and was inspired to write a poem using music. The four movements are Haiku, Soliloquy, Free Verse, and Sonnet. Sonnet was inspired by Shakespearean love sonnets and plays with time to portray the freeness of poetry.

- Lisa Duke Lamb

Lisa Duke Lamb (b. 1986) holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Flute Performance and Composition from Penn State University and a Master of Music degree in Harp Performance from UT Austin. Lisa has published pieces through Falls House Press, ALRY Publications, and Harp Column Music. Her works have been performed at conferences held by the Texas Music Educator's Association and the American Harp Society. "Baile Feliz" was selected as repertoire for the 2015 Midwest Harp Festival. Lisa resides in Austin with her husband Shane (who she met at a summer composition program) and their two children and three cats. She enjoys teaching harp and flute students, playing for weddings and other events, and performing with the Austin Civic Orchestra.

Doves of Saint Nicholas Church

"What birds were they?" begins a paragraph in Chapter V of James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. I was blown away by the amazing writing of the passage, but the question stuck with me. I have spent decades enjoying birds but never knowing enough to identify them—only to ask the question. Then on my way to work, as I drove by the church, a flock of doves (or some such birds) resting on a wire startled and launched into the watercolor gray sky. A ray of morning sunlight escaped the cloud cover and suddenly lit them, and their grace and unity of motion threw me into poetry-writing mode. When Marjorie needed a sonnet, I was delighted to have one lying around. . .

- Sylvia E. Halloran

Text:

Doves of St. Nicholas' Church

What birds are they that fly with ease so high, So free, to make my envious spirit weep As I, with heavy bone and sinew keep Connection to the earth, while they the sky? In unison ranks, great tribes in twisting flight, Unhinged from tenuous rest along the wire, Seize motion in a sudden burst, conspire To move as one in sun-reflected white.

Then turning to an edge their dark sides show,
A fluid shadow funnel into blue

Mysterious heaven's depth. Alas, not true

That careless freedom guides their liquid flow;
They live at whim of weather, food, and foe—
A homeless, begging horde where e'er they go.

- Sylvia E. Halloran

Sonnet of the Moon

Set to a delightful romantic poem by 17th century poet Charles Best, this is an elegant love song with soaring melodies and dramatic harmonies. A gentle, flowing piano accompaniment completes the picture. The piece was commissioned by a high school choir for performance at the 2005 ACDA National Convention.

Text:

Look how the pale queen of the silent night Doth cause the ocean to attend upon her, And he, as long as she is in his sight, With her full tide is ready her to honor. But when the silver waggon of the moon Is mounted up so high he cannot follow, The sea calls home his crystal waves to moan,

- Charles Best (1570–1627)

And with low ebb doth manifest his sorrow. So you that are the sovereign of my heart Have all my joys attending on your will; My joys low-ebbing when you do depart, When you return their tide my heart doth fill. So as you come and as you do depart, Joys ebb and flow within my tender heart.

Star Sonnet

"Star Sonnet" is the second in a cycle of nocturnes for mixed chorus and piano, exploring observational and psychological experiences associated with love, nature, darkness, and light. The texts are original and approach these themes in different ways; this piece takes on the poetic form of a Shakespearean sonnet while describing as its subject a single star in the night sky. Wonder at the glowing star's distant origin, its constancy, and its emotional effect on the narrator are all featured themes that control the mood of this reverent but dark text. Written for a cappella choir to connect its bookend accompanied counterparts, "Ballade to the Moon" and "Lullaby," this work serves as a haunting interruption to the romantic piano textures before and after, and helps depict a trepid curiosity of the outer reaches of the night sky.

- Daniel Elder

Text:

In stillness high above the slumb'ring shore where wistful waves of foam caress the sand, a silent watchman o'er the darkened land, adrift celestial seas of twilight soars.

She passes softly in the heavens deep—her silver skin aglow with radiant hue, her eyes enchanting globes of glittering dew;

Daniel Elder

through rays of moonlight rich with heavenly sleep. What dreams have I that she should give them flight, enlivened in a momentary flame— what fears of hope unfounded could she tame to joy, arising toward the hov'ring height!

O, Beaming Star, illumine heaven's floor until the sun should bear its light once more.

Thy Eternal Summer

When planning this concert of music based on sonnets Trevor and I agreed that we wanted to make sure a setting of one of the most beloved and well-known sonnets by Shakespeare, Sonnet 18, was part of the program. Since many of the composers were already contributing their own works I had the idea of writing a piece together. We divided up the poem and each took a section of text, set it to music and then passed it along to the next composer without any information about what we were doing musically and left it to them to interpret. The final product is a lush, beautiful setting of this glorious text. This musical version of a relay race resulted in a lovely, seamless piece of true collaborative music making.

- Robbie LaBanca

Text:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date. Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimmed; And every fair from fair sometime declines,

- William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed; But thy eternal summer shall not fade, Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st, Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade, When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st. So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Two Sonnets

As a huge fan of Allen Ginsberg I jumped at the chance to set the only two sonnets he ever conceived. These poems are inspired by Jack Kerouac as can be seen in some of the imagery. My interpretation is that of a spirit lost to time in the smoldering ashes of a once great city on Earth. This spirit is recounting their story from living in Hell to living in stillness. The voices of great thinkers still linger but find no refuge in the burning world. This text is set just for women's voices to keep a stark, ethereal feeling until it erupts in the cacophony of sound at the closing. The second movement is a warning to all the great cities on Earth. Their sins are coming to fruition and a blazing angel is being sent to lay them to waste. Perhaps this is the warning that preceded the ruination mentioned in the first poem. This text is set for only men's voices to add weight and drama to the words. Starting and ending in a bombastic fashion the middle section is set using slightly altered iterations of Requiem chants to create a layered funeral song for the cities and their citizens.

Robbie LaBanca

Text:

I

I dwelled in Hell on earth to write this rhyme, I live in stillness now, in living flame; I witness Heaven in unholy time, I room in the renowned city, am Unknown. The fame I dwell in is not mine, I would not have it. Angels in the air Serenade my senses in delight. Intelligence of poets, saints, and fair Characters converse with me all night. But all the streets are burning everywhere. The city is burning these multitudes that climb Her buildings. Their inferno is the same I scaled as a stupendous blazing stair. They vanish as I look into the light.

- Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)

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Woe unto thee, Manhattan, woe to thee,
Woe unto all the cities of the world.
Repent, Chicagos, O repent; ah, me!
Los Angeles, now thou art gone so wild,
I think thou art still mighty, yet shall be,
As the earth shook, and San Francisco fell,
An angel in an agony of flame.
City of horrors, New York so much like Hell,
How soon thou shalt be a city-without-name,
A tomb of souls, and a poor broken knell.
Fire and fire on London, Moscow shall die,
And Paris her livid atomies be rolled
Together into the Woe of the blazing bellAll cities then shall toll for their great fame.

Two German Sonnets

The word "German", in this case, refers to the language, as opposed to the nationalities of the poets who composed the two sonnets. After all, Rilke was native to Austria, though he lived a portion of his life in Munich, among other places. Both Rilke and Goethe are among the most revered figures of all time in the artistic world, and rightfully so. Both were a part of a culture that included poetry, visual arts, and philosophy. It's the way that philosophy for both men was intertwined with their understanding of science and nature that draws me to their work. Their poetry represents so much more than the literal words themselves. Both of the selected sonnets are vividly descriptive of those things which our senses experience: colors, tastes, even the feeling of freedom. I explored an extensive harmonic language and modality to depict those experiences throughout. Just flirting with the whole-tone scale seems to evoke certain reactions from the general listening masses! What was important in the process was maintaining relatively direct, simple melodies while the harmony accounted for most of the adventurous aspects of the work. Much like my previous work, "Aquamarine", "Two German Sonnets" is more atmospheric than narrative, despite the spots in each movement that could be interpreted as climactic. Those are simply places to bask in a few more colors!

- Trevor Shaw

I. To a Golden Heart, Which He Wore on His Neck

Recall the happiness, the glittering joy
I still wear around my neck Do you last longer, o my soul-band,
To extend those short days filled with love?
Lily, I flee from your presence.
I am stuck roaming foreign lands,
Through distant valleys and forests.
Alas, I believed Lily's heart could not
Unlink from my heart so soon.
As when a bird breaks from a snare
And flies into the verdant forest
He leaves behind him evidence of his capture Just a bit of the threads that bound him.
He cannot be the same free bird he once was,
For he will always be a bird which was once imprisoned.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

II. The Sonnets to Orpheus, No. 13

Luscious apple, pear and banana, gooseberry
All of these taste like death and life in the mouth,
I suppose
Read it on a child's face
If this scares her, you have gone too far.
Do you slowly become unable to say your name?
Where words once flowed,
Find the surprise the pulp has unleashed,
I dare say it was the sweet apple.
The sweetest and richest fruit
Quietly makes us awake, clear, lucid,
Doubly aware of your connection
To the surrounding sunny, earthy environs.
O, the experience of such feeling, the enormous joy!

- Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

The Garden of Adonis, Op. 245

Alan Hovhaness (1911- 2000) was an American composer of Armenian and Scottish descent. He studied at the New England Conservatory and was strongly influenced by the music of India, Japan, and Korea. Almost all of his works are religious or mystical in nature. The Garden of Adonis Op. 245 for flute and harp is based on Book III Canto VI from The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser, describing a garden of rebirth where souls appear as flowers. The piece is dedicated to Rafnis Bancoc (Francis Bacon). Chaski flutist Adrienne Inglis and harpist Shana Norton perform two of the seven movements, Grave and Allegro.

- Adrienne Inglis

O, Proud Left Foot

Who amongst us could forget the famous "Hokey Pokey" and it's Shakespearean parody "O Proud Left Foot"? With magical approach Steve Murray has set this whimsical semi-sonnet in an engaging a cappella Madrigal setting for SATB choir.

Text:

O proud left foot, that ventures quick within Then soon upon a backward journey lithe. Anon, once more the gesture, then begin: Command sinistral pedestal to writhe. Commence thou then the fervid Hokey-Poke, A mad gyration, hips in wanton swirl. To spin! A wilde release from Heaven's yoke. Blessed dervish! Surely canst go, girl. The Hoke, the Poke -- banish now thy doubt Verily, I say, 'tis what it's all about.

Jeff Brechlin

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The Central Christian Church Acoustic Sanctuary is a bimonthly concert series that provides free music concerts in our historic Sanctuary in order to help build and bring together the Austin community and raise funds for various worthy causes.

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