

Lullaby

For Flute, Bb Clarinet, Piano, Percussion, Tenor, and Violin



Instrumentation

Flute

Bb Clarinet

Piano

Percussion

Tenor

Violin

Duration

Approx. 7 min. 50 sec.

Lullaby

W. H. Auden - 1907-1973

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

Soul and body have no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit's carnal ecstasy.

Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell,
And fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry:
Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of welcome show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness find you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
Watched by every human love.

Poem Summary

Source: <https://www.enotes.com/topics/lullaby-w-h-auden/in-depth>

W. H. Auden's "Lullaby," his most famous love lyric, perhaps is better known by its famous first line, "Lay your sleeping head, my love." In musical and rhetorical lines of mostly trochaic tetrameter verse, the narrator watches his sleeping lover through the night and, in four ten-line stanzas, reflects upon the value and necessity of both passionate love and beauty and their brevity.

The speaker gazes upon his lover beside him and sings this philosophical "lullaby" about love, beauty, and time's ruthless pull. The speaker realizes that time eventually will erode his lover's beauty, as it someday will suck children down into their graves. He prays to be allowed to hold his beloved in his admittedly "faithless arm" until dawn, because at this enchanted moment the beloved seems to him to be "entirely beautiful." The speaker asks for a temporary reprieve from time for this one exquisite night to prolong the beauty of the moment and of his lover.

In the next stanza, the narrator reflects on the timeless and boundless feelings people experience when they are ardently in love and feel united in body and soul. Lovers seem to "swoon" into an enchanted union in which their bodies and spirits merge—it is as if Venus, the goddess of love, suffused them with feelings of sympathy, "universal love," and "hope" so that the mortals feel unity and timelessness. Into this idyllic feeling of timeless passion, Auden inserts another form of intense "carnal ecstasy," which is experienced through the mind. Ascetic hermits through abstract thought find a mystical passion that also leads to feelings of unity and timelessness. Auden equates these two different modes of finding passionate and timeless unity—one through the body with a mortal lover, and one through the mind with a spiritual entity.

As in many Auden poems, there is a sudden reversal in the third stanza. The speaker makes an ironic shift in attitude away from the timeless feelings of ecstasy associated with passionate love to the more realistic view that this moment of tenderness and ecstasy may vanish at the stroke of midnight. Even though he realizes that nothing is certain and his lover's faithfulness may evaporate, even though this moment of passion may be as short-lived as the latest fashionable madman's ranting, and even though this night may cost him dearly, the speaker is ready to pay the costs and to suffer whatever pains the cards of fortune may heap upon him. At any cost, he wants nothing to be lost from this one magical, fleeting night—"Not a whisper, not a thought,/ Not a kiss nor look." He wants to seize this night of passionate ecstasy from time and make it eternal.

In the last stanza, the magical night ends, the vision of beauty and love fades, but the speaker prays for a benevolent day that will bless his still dreaming lover. Apparently, the speaker has been contemplating the beauty of his lover and their passion the entire night. The speaker hopes that the dawn brings his beloved a day so beautiful that this lovely mortal world will obliterate the need for supernatural worlds—the day should be a veritable heaven on earth. He invokes the "involuntary powers" of love, beauty, and poetry, and hopes they will feed the lover so that he may survive all the times of dryness and times of insults that life may bring. The speaker wishes his lover will be blessed and soothed by this lullaby and will be watched over by a benevolent godlike human love.

Lullaby

for Flute, Bb Clarinet, Percussion, Tenor, Piano, and Violin*

W. H. Auden (1907 - 1973)

Slow $\text{♩} = 38$

Flute *pp* *p* *mp* *p*

Clarinet in Bb *pp* *p* *mf* *p* *n*

Percussion Triangle *pp* Vibraphone *p* *mf* Glockenspiel *p*

Piano *pp* *p* *mf*

Tenor Solo **Slow** $\text{♩} = 38$ *falsetto* *p* Lay your

Violin **Slow** $\text{♩} = 38$ *p* *mp* *p*

8

Fl. *p* *p* *3*

Cl. *p* *p*

Glock. Triangle Vibraphone *p*

Pno. *p* *Red.* *Red.* *Red.*

T. Solo sleep - ing head, my love, Hu - man on my faith - less arm;

Vln. *ord.* *3*

14

Fl. *pp* *p* *mf*

Cl. *pp* *p* *mf*

Vib. Glockenspiel Cymbals (soft mallets) Triangle *p* *mf* >

Pno. *p* *mf* Ped. Ped. Ped.

T. Solo *p* *mf*
Time and fe - vers burn a - way In-di-vid - u - al beau - ty from Thought-ful chil

Vln. *p* *mf*

20

Fl. *p* *pp* *mp*

Cl. *p* *pp* *mp*

Tri. Vibraphone Triangle Vibraphone Triangle Cymbals *p* *mp*

Pno. *p* *pp* *p* *mp* Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

T. Solo *p* *pp* *mp*
- dren, and the grave Proves the child e - phem - er - al: But in my

Vln. *p* *pp* *p* *mp*

26

Fl.

Cl.

Cym.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

mf

f

mf

f

mf

f

mf

f

Triangle Glockenspiel Triangle Glockenspiel Cymbals Tam-tam

arms till break of day Let the liv - ing crea - ture lie, Mor - tal, guilt - y,

31

Fl.

Cl.

T.-t.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

p

pp

p

pp

p

pp

p

pp

Triangle I.v. Vibraphone Glockenspiel I.v. Triangle

but to me The en - tire - ly beau - ti - ful.

53

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

Glockenspiel

Tam-tam

Glockenspiel

Glockenspiel

Triangle

Vibraphone

Triangle

Wood Blocks

Cymbals

f

mf

mp

f

mf

mp

Reo.

Grave the vi - sion Of su-per - nat - u - ral sym - pa - thy, U - ni-ver-sal love and hope;

61

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

Triangle

Wood Blocks

Triangle

Wood Blocks

Triangle

Snare Drum

p

p

p

p

While an ab-tract in - sight wakes A-mong the gla-ciers and the rocks The her-mit's car - nal

glo.

loco

ord.

p

68

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

Triangle

Snare Drum

Cymbals

Glockenspiel

ec - sta - sy.

69

70

71

72

73

Fl.

Cl.

Glock.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

Cymbals

Triangle

Cymbals

Triangle

Tam-tam

Glockenspiel

Cer-tain-ty, fi-

79

Fl.

Cl.

Glock.

Cymbals Triangle Glockenspiel Cymbals Triangle

Pno.

Red Red Red Red Red Red Red

T. Solo

del-i-ty, On the stroke of mid - night pass Like vi - bra - tions of a

Vln.

85

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Vibraphone Cymbals Triangle Vibraphone

Pno.

Red Red Red

T. Solo

bell And fash-ion-a - ble mad - men raise

Vln.

97

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Glockenspiel

Cymbals

Cymbals

Tam-tam

Cymbals

Vibraphone

Pno.

T. Solo

- tell, Shall be paid,

Vln.

101

Fl.

Cl.

Vib.

Triangle

Pno.

T. Solo

but from this night Not a whisper, not a thought,

Vln.

105

Fl.

Cl.

Tri.

Snare Drum

Triangle

Vibraphone

Triangle

Vibraphone

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

Not a kiss nor look be lost.

[illegible]

121

Fl.

Cl.

Vib.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

p

Vibraphone Triangle Vibraphone Triangle Glockenspiel Cymbals Glockenspiel

p

p

Red.

winds of dawn that blow Soft-ly round your dream - ing head Such a day of wel - come show

128

Fl.

Cl.

T.-t.

Pno.

T. Solo

Vln.

mf

mf

mf

mf

p

Tam-tam Cymbals Glockenspiel Triangle Vibraphone Triangle Vibraphone Triangle

Eye and knock - ing heart may bless, Find the mor - tal world e - nough;

molto rit.
p
