



What Will Stand: Songs from (F)light, a Collaborative Borderlands Song Cycle

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Abstract

(F)light: a borderlands song cycle is a creative response to migration. We wrote and composed the cycle of nine songs in relation to two particular borders: those between Arizona, United States and Sonora, Mexico; and Maine, United States and New Brunswick, Canada. The songs address borders, geopolitics, mobility, emotion, and narrative. We briefly contextualize our collaboration on *(F)light* and then share three songs from the project, as scores and as sound files performed by Women in Harmony, a women's chorus in Portland, Maine.



In May of 2011, Women in Harmony, a women's chorus in Portland, Maine, premiered the nine songs of *(F)light: a borderlands song cycle* as the centerpiece of a migration-themed concert. The song cycle is a collaboration between two poets based in southern Arizona and a composer based in northern Maine. *(F)light* took shape over two week-long residencies along the Arizona (United States)/Sonora (Mexico) border, in December 2009, and the Maine (United States)/New Brunswick (Canada) border, in June 2010. During the residencies, we visited sites along each border, such as the Nogales-Grand Avenue Port of Entry in the twin cities of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora; the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Arizona; and the Saint John River, which flows between Maine and New Brunswick. Learning through our local connections, we spoke with rangers, writers, scientists, and artists of the borderlands; and we gathered with community members in our homes for informal conversations about border and migration narratives. These encounters contributed to the songs of *(F)light*. Since the premiere by Women in Harmony, the work has been performed multiple times, including at the 2014 Sister Singers Festival in Urbana, Illinois. The three songs included here as MP3s, titled "Lives We Take," "In the First Place," and "What Will Stand," were recorded live at the 2011 premiere.

(F)light is about migration. Quin-Easter, based in northern Maine, proposed a collaborative cycle of songs based on narratives of human migration and bird migration. For Burk and Magrane, based in southern Arizona, a bird species rare to the United States provided a guiding metaphor for the project. In February 2009, the Southeast Arizona Rare Bird Alert reported the appearance of a Blue mockingbird in Douglas, Arizona—one of only five recorded U.S. sightings of this species, which is native to Mexico. When Burk and Magrane arrived at Slaughter Ranch, where the Blue mockingbird had been spotted, we joined visitors from all over the U.S. and Canada who were there for the same purpose. Although the visitors could more easily see a Blue mockingbird in Mexico, the motivation for their travel to Slaughter Ranch was to see the species in the United States, a place where it does not live and where it had crossed over. We were struck by the language used to describe the Blue mockingbird in printed and online field guides. The Blue mockingbird is called a "Mexican specialty." In *(F)light*, we wished to explore and provoke the ideologies and narratives that designate a bird migrant as "special" and a human migrant as "illegal."

While geographers have looked to nonhumans as actors in borderlands politics (Sundberg, 2011), the Blue mockingbird rather brought up for us a tension in discourse and language. The juxtaposition of the terms "special" and "illegal" brought a sense of cognitive dissonance¹ around human and non-human

¹ Madsen (2015) writes that "pre-emptively embracing rather than retrospectively minimizing cognitive dissonance can be beneficial" (193) in research. This can perhaps be even more true for creative work, which may present dissonance in a way that allows for multiple interpretations at once.

positionality and value, and around racism, xenophobia, and fear. Indeed, discourse and competing narratives along the border work in an emotional and affective realm, shaping border subjectivities and narratives of the region (Williams & Boyce, 2013).

Narratives invoked and provoked during our work on *(F)light* in 2010 included discourse about racial profiling in the wake of the then recently enacted Arizona Senate Bill 1070, commonly referred to as the “show me your papers” law; the U.S.–Mexico border wall as an obstacle to ecological migration patterns; border checkpoints as disruptive to transnational family life; tensions between U.S. federal border policies and Indigenous sovereignty; smugglers and violent conflict in border regions; injury or death in the Arizona desert after unsuccessful crossing attempts; employment opportunities and reunion with family after successful crossings; the phenomenon of border tourism; and the policies and statements of controversial public officials such as Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Our own subjectivities and multiple levels of privilege—particularly our privilege as white U.S. citizens—mediated our hearing, interpretation, and embodied experience of the narratives. The racialized dimensions of our privilege were manifest, for example, at vehicular border checkpoints in Southern Arizona, where we were not asked to show our papers; our white faces were accepted as proof of our U.S. citizenship.

One way in which we engage the tensions of these and other border narratives within *(F)light* is through our use of the rhetorical mode in some of the songs, notably in “What Will Stand.” With lyrics such as “pushing politics across the border/ people pay the price,” the song uses broad rhetorical language drawn from our experience of border narratives: namely, that borderlands politics intervene, often detrimentally and certainly differentially, in borderlands lives. Mirroring this rhetorical mode, the music composed for “What Will Stand” has an anthemic, sweeping quality, particularly in the chorus of “What will stand/ what will stand besides the land?” While aware of their tendency to simplify, we offer rhetorical flourishes such as these to express our belief that—in a borderlands beset by many competing narratives—it can be wise to make a stand.

Other songs build momentum through the use of repetition. “In the First Place,” which focuses on the disruptions to Indigenous lifeways and sovereignty caused by political borders, is punctuated by the refrain from which it takes its title. While the phrase “in the first place” can feel essentialized, we intend it to evoke the first right of place of Indigenous peoples, such as the O’odham and Yaqui in the south and the Micmac and Maliseet in the north. It is to these peoples, and other Indigenous peoples whose homelands are interrupted by current political borders, whom we address the phrase “you who belong here.” The rejoinder that completes the song, “Learn to see... what was here in the first place,” is addressed to ourselves, the artists of *(F)light*: we who are struggling to learn to see, both artistically and personally.

In the end, *(F)light* is a project about the absence of borders as much as the presence of them. Arizona Poet Laureate Alberto Ríos (2007) writes that “The border is what joins us,/ Not what separates us” – “La frontera es lo que nos une,/No lo que nos separa” (4–5). Born and raised in the twin cities of Nogales on the U.S.–Mexico border, Ríos writes poetry, fiction, and memoir about growing up in the vibrant culture of ‘Ambos Nogales’: ‘both Nogales,’ one in Arizona and one in Sonora, Mexico, joined by the border, formerly the site of frequent and informal crossings for visits, work, and errands. Ríos’s writing about Ambos Nogales and the border that “joins us, / Not... separates us” (2007, 5) presents an alternative narrative of borders, stressing cooperation rather than conflict.²

Here, we share songs from *(F)light* as acts of creative geography. As in geopoetics (Magrane, 2015), these songs exist as much in an associational, affective, and emotional mode as in an explanatory analytic mode. Attoh (2011) has written that we may “find the trace of a melody, the palpitations of a rhythm, or the beginnings of a tune” (280) in our research and field notes. We agree. And—as our intended product from the beginning of this collaboration was a song cycle—we’d also like to offer the inverse: in our songs and creative work we may find other ways of approaching research.

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² Similarly, in a case study called “Narrative, Network, and Conservation on the Arizona-Sonora Border,” Lejano et al. (2013) write of how “border environmental network activists stress cooperation almost as a sign of protest against more mainstream or grand narratives that portray the border as violent, corrupt” (99).

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In the First Place

Listen to song here



♩ = 110 (optional: perform as trio)

TOP (solo)

MIDDLE (solo)

BOTTOM (solo)

In the first place the op-po-site of na-tive is not a-li-en__ in the first

In the first place the op-po-site of na-tive is not a-li-en__ the

In the first place the op-po-site of na-tive is not a-li-en__ the

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Song 5 of 9 in (F)light: a borderlands song cycle

7

place__ in the first place In the first place O'-

op-po-site of na-tive is im - per-i - al__ In the first place O'-

op-po-site of na-tive is im - per-i - al__ In the first place O'-

14

od - ham and Ya - qui__ Mic-mac and Ma -li- seet__ bob-cat and ja- guar_ de- sert and

od - ham and Ya - qui__ Mic-mac and Ma -li- seet__ bob-cat and ja- guar_

od - ham and Ya - qui__ Mic-mac and Ma -li- seet__ bob-cat and

21

ri - ver_ you who be - long here_ in the first place
 de - sert and ri - ver_ you who be - long here_ in the first place
 ja - guar_ de - sert and ri - ver_ you who be - long here_ in the first place

28

in_ the first place In_ the first place came the sick - ness then the
 in_ the first place In the first place came the sick-ness then the smoke-stacks then the
 in the first place In the first place came the

34

smoke - stacks then the barbed wire and fi-nal-ly the wall came the mo - ney then the
 barbed wire and fi-nal-ly the wall came the mo - ney then the smug-glers then the
 sick - ness then the smoke-stacks then the barbed wire and fi-nal-ly the wall came the

39

smug-glers then the po - wers try-ing a - bove all_____

po - wers_ try - ing a - bove___ all try - ing to make it the last place

mo - ney then the smug-glers then the po- wers try-ing a - bove___ all

46

In the first place_____ learn to see

In the first place_____ learn to see

In the first place_____ learn to see

53

in the first place

See_ what was here in the first place_____

in the first place

Lives We Take

Listen to song here



♩ = 140

SOPRANO 1

SOPRANO 2

ALTO 1

ALTO 2

Bum_ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum_ bum bum bum_ bum bum

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Song 1 of 9 in *(F)light: a borderlands song cycle*

5

Ba-da ba-da ba-da

Optional: hand drum accompaniment ad lib

Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum_ bum bum

10

ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

15

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

forte - melody
War-bler high in a tree__

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

19

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba
 from branch to branch__ just out of sight__ just out of sight
 Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

23

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba
 ea - sy to hear__ but not to see
 Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

27

Peo - ple in dan -

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba val-ley by__ night__ peo - ple in dan -

a - cross the val - ley by__ night__ peo - ple in dan -

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum_ bum bum bum_ bum bum

31

- ger ta-king flight__

- ger ta-king flight__

- ger ta-king flight__

Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum bum_ bum

36

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

War-bler

bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

41

high in a tree__ from branch to branch__ just out of sight

Ba-da ba da ba da ba ba ba Ba-da ba da ba da ba ba ba

high in a tree__ from branch to branch__ just out of sight

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

45

— but not to see —

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

just out of sight — ea - sy to hear

Bum — bum bum bum — bum bum bum Bum — bum bum bum — bum bum bum

49

but not to see — just out of sight —

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

— but not to see — a - cross the val-

Bum — bum bum bum — bum bum bum Bum — bum bum bum — bum bum bum

53

Peo - ple in dan - ger ta - king flight__

val - ley by__ night__ peo - ple in dan - ger ta - king flight__ *f* peo - ple in dan

ley by__ night__ peo - ple in dan - ger ta - king flight__

Bum_ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum_ bum bum bum_ bum bum

57

- ger ta - king flight__

Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum bum bum

62

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

67

Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

Bor - der -

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

71

Musical score for measures 71-74. It consists of four staves. The first two staves are vocal lines with lyrics. The third staff is a bass line with lyrics. The fourth staff is a bass line with rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba
Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba
lands Bor - der - lands sto - ries we hear
Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

75

Musical score for measures 75-78. It consists of four staves. The first two staves are vocal lines with lyrics. The third staff is a bass line with lyrics. The fourth staff is a bass line with rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba
Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba
sto - ries we make__ Bor - derlands
Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

79

Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

Bor - der lands some lives we val-

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

83

Ba-da ba-da ba ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da Bor - der -

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

ue some lives we take_ Bor - der -

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

87

lands Bor - der - lands

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

lands Bor - der - lands sto - ries we hear

Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

91

sto - ries we hear__ sto - ries we make__

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

sto - ries we make__ Bor - der lands

Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

95

Bor - der - lands Bor - der - lands some lives we val

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

Bor - der lands some lives we val

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

99

- ue some we take__ some lives we take__

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

ue some lives we take__ Bor - der -

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

103

Bor - der - lands Bor - der - lands some lives we val

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

lands Bor - der lands some lives we val

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

107

- ue some we take some lives we take

Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba Ba-da ba-da ba-da ba ba ba

ue some lives we take Bor - der lands

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum__ bum bum

111 *softer, building to forte at ritard*

some lives we take__ some lives we take__

Ba-da ba da ba da ba ba ba Ba-da ba da ba da ba ba ba

— Bor - der lands__ Bor - der lands

Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum Bum__ bum bum bum_ bum bum

115

some lives we take__

Ba - da ba - da ba - da ba ba ba

— Bor - - der - lands_

Bum__ bum__ bum bum__ bum__ bum

117 *Ritard*

The image shows a musical score for four voices, likely a choir or quartet, in a key of B-flat major (two flats). The score is marked with a tempo of 'Ritard' (ritardando). The lyrics are: 'some lives we take___ Bor - der - lands', 'Ba - da ba - da ba - da Bor - der - lands', 'Bor - der - lands', and 'Bum___ bum___ bum bum___ bum___ bum bum'. The first voice part has a melodic line with a long note on 'take___'. The second voice part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The third voice part has a long note on 'Bor'. The fourth voice part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score is written on four staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The lyrics are written below the notes.

some lives we take___ Bor - der - lands

Ba - da ba - da ba - da Bor - der - lands

Bor - der - lands

Bum___ bum___ bum bum___ bum___ bum bum

What Will Stand

Listen to song here



♩ = 90

TOP

MIDDLE

BOTTOM

Maps and treat-ies, blood and blood-less wars shift-ing lines in time

Humm

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Song 9 of 9 in *(F)light: a borderlands song cycle*

4

Push-ing pol-i-tics a-cross the bor-der peo-ple pay the price Five hun-dred

Humm

7

years from now_ what will stand what will stand be-sides the land Five hun-dred

years from now what will stand what will stand be-sides the land

10

years_ and_ what will be_ what will be_ your coun - try_

Years from now what will be what will be_ your coun - try_

Humm

13

Sons and daugh- ters, ge - ne - a - lo - gies_ shift-ing lines in time_

Sons and daugh- ters, ge - ne - a - lo - gies shift-ing lines in time_

Humm

16

Peo-ple hold-ing on to fam-ily sto - ries keep his-tory a - live_ Five hun-dred

Peo-ple hold-ing on to fam-ily sto - ries keep his-tory a - live_ Five hun-dred

Humm

Five hun-dred

19

years from now what stands

years from now_ what will stand what will stand_ be-sides the land Five hun-dred

years from now what will stand what will stand_ be-sides the land

22

Years from now what stands_

years_ and_ what will be_ what will be_ your coun - try

Years from now what will be what will be_ your coun - try_

25 *Slightly slower - quiet and thoughtful*

Maps and coun - tries, on-ly in our minds_ Five hun - dred

shift-ing lines in time

Humm Five_ hun - dred

29

years shift ing lines in

Maps and coun - tries, on - ly in our minds__ shift - ing lines in time

years Humm shift - ing lines in

33 *Softer to end - fade down to pp*

time Five hun - dred

Maps and coun - tries, on - ly in our minds__ shift - ing lines in time

time Humm Five_ hun - dred

37 *mp*

years

Maps and coun - tries, on - ly in our minds__ shift - ing lines in

years Humm

39

shift - ing lines in time

time

mp

shift - ing lines in time