

*Every Lover is A Warrior* is a cycle for solo harp that takes traditional folk songs from three different countries and recasts them with original material, using ostinati (or repeating patterns) as the underpinning in all three movements. The first movement transforms the Appalachian tune *John Riley* to create a Bluegrass piece for harp. Harpist Bridget Kibbey had suggested to me that a bluegrass piece was missing from the harp repertoire. The song tells of a soldier, John Riley, who returns home after eight years at war and tests the faithfulness of his girlfriend. He finds her in her garden and, seeing that she does not recognize him after so much time, presents himself as a stranger and asks her to marry him. She says no, she is waiting for her John Riley, who has been away at war, but to whom she will remain true. He asks, but what if he has died in battle? What if he has found someone else? What if he was lost at sea? And with each question she remains steadfast. Finally, he reveals his identity and says ‘weep no more, my own true love, I am your long-lost John Riley’, and they go off into the sunset. The tune for the second movement comes from a charming French hymn, recast using an *ostinato* consisting of harmonics. The original hymn depicts a love more spiritual than romantic. The third movement combines two Hungarian folk songs: *When they Take Me for a Soldier*, and a Csardas in which a soldier laments having to depart for lonely barracks in Vienna, wishing he could remain behind and be a rosebud in his lover’s garden. The two songs become intertwined in a Quodlibet, which provides the cycle’s culmination. Themes of love and war unify the work. Its outer movements present soldiers as lovers, but those they leave behind are warriors too in their own way, through their faith. The central movement depicts a savior coming to earth as a lover of mankind, and as a warrior for love. The piece was recorded by Bridget Kibbey on her debut CD ‘Love is Come Again’, and has been performed throughout the United States, including by winners of the National Harp Association’s annual competition.

- Kati Agócs