

Song of Perfect Propriety was written for the Cornell University Women's Chorus as part of a multi-year commissioning project unofficially called "No Whining, No Flowers," in which several women composers were commissioned to set texts by women on topics other than the above. I was inspired by Dorothy Parker's feisty poem, and by hearing the Chorus sing director Scott Tucker's wonderfully unpredictable arrangement of Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." "Writing little verse, as little ladies do" might be construed as whining, but it doesn't have to be that way...

SONG OF PERFECT PROPRIETY

Oh, I should like to ride the seas,
A roaring buccaneer;
A cutlass banging at my knees,
A dirk behind my ear.
And when my captives' chains would clank
I'd howl with glee and drink,
And then fling out the quivering plank
And watch the beggars sink.

I'd like to straddle gory decks,
And dig in laden sands,
And know the feel of throbbing necks
Between my knotted hands.
Oh, I should like to strut and curse
Among my blackguard crew....
But I am writing little verse,
As little ladies do.

Oh, I should like to dance and laugh
And pose and preen and sway,
And rip the hearts of men in half,
And toss the bits away.
I'd like to view the reeling years
Through unastonished eyes,
And dip my finger-tips in tears,
And give my smiles for sighs.

I'd stroll beyond the ancient bounds,
And tap at fastened gates,
And hear the prettiest of sounds,--
The clink of shattered fates.
My slaves I'd like to bind with thongs
That cut and burn and chill....
But I am writing little songs,
As little ladies will.

by Dorothy Parker (1893 - 1967)

The composer wishes to thank the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for authorizing this use of Dorothy Parker's work.

duration: c. 4:00