

# MONARCH

## The Annotated Edition

*Each song is annotated with notes that serve to illuminate, contextualize, or explain the lyrics.*

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### FERNWEH<sup>1</sup> (SHORE)

Wet rain, waiting<sup>2</sup> under a cloud that's full of rain  
Cold feet<sup>3</sup> standing upon a shore that's cold and grey  
Endless horizon, that melts away from left to right  
Blurrifies the edges, where sky and ocean reunite

{Sing}<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Fernweh” is a German word that means “far-sickness”.

<sup>2</sup> This season was marked with a theme of waiting. We were waiting on the Lord for direction in life. We were told we shouldn't have any more children, and we waited to hear back from doctors. We were searching for and waiting on a new house. And some of these songs were even written while I was waiting for my last album to arrive, which took many months more than expected.

<sup>3</sup> “Cold feet” are fear, and in this song, the fear of moving forward—even while being under the influence of “far-sickness”, and longing for things not here, or not yet.

<sup>4</sup> This melody wanted to emerge a number of times while writing this album, but felt most at home here. The ascending rise and descending return of the melody, as well as the lack of return to a resolving note, to me reflected the outward and inward pulls of this season, and incidentally, the ebb and flow of waves.

## SNOW

Please don't let me fall into hesitation yet  
Cause it's these moments when silence  
starts sliding downhill quick<sup>1</sup>

And I'm watching trees go flying  
never digging in my heels to walk among them<sup>2</sup>  
And the amnesia of this traveling  
begins to blur the memory of what I set out for

Snow, my contact between me and something I remember<sup>3</sup>  
A voice moving softly through the trees followed my people  
around the Caspian Sea<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup>And have we ever really listened  
with our stiff necks and broken wisdom?  
Picking berry-laden branches  
And did our trade or our surrender  
make us any less of pretenders?  
Tell me

Break whatever's in me  
that makes me dull and makes me dream  
of lesser colors lesser things; you can unzip me from the seams  
Kick all the props, cut all the strings, divert generational streams  
dig out my heart and make me scream if that is what will make me sing

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<sup>1</sup> Times of prayer, or meditation, can be a wonderful times of communion, or it can digress into thoughtless worry. I have learned to have grace for my wandering thoughts, as I know God does.

<sup>2</sup> In the assessment of life, while considering what should be done with our precious time, I sometimes feel that we have the tendency not to fully engage ourselves in living. If we are not careful, weighing options can become our life, while committing is what truly engages our hearts.

<sup>3</sup> Being in nature, amongst created things, puts me in a place where my inner ears are better at hearing.

<sup>4</sup> I discovered that one of the branches of my family tree were Magyar, from Austria-Hungary. When I looked into the origins of the Magyar, I discovered that they came to what is now Hungary from the eastern side of the Caspian Sea. I wondered at the way they lived and the language they spoke and the people they would have been in contact with.

<sup>5</sup> This stanza is largely a reflection of my research of my Magyar ancestors. My wife and I had a joke at the time that my ancestors were nomadic, and seemed to love berries, and her people must have loved bread, as I have a strong affinity for berries and fruit in general, and she loves a good piece of buttered bread, though she's currently taking a break from gluten.

## THESE ARE THE DAYS

These are the days we're making up as we go<sup>1</sup>  
we drift through the hollows to find the old road  
don't remember days of your sorrow,  
remember when you heard the call<sup>2</sup>  
carry today & tomorrow,  
and rightly count the who's and when's<sup>3</sup>

Some people say money, and others say plans  
but I'm hungry for freedom that never changes hands  
spring, summer and autumn leave me restless  
will winter bring its peace to man?  
But hidden in time there is a constant  
if we can only enter in<sup>4</sup>

I've been to your house once  
the doors were tall & wide  
so I was surprised when it was warm inside  
Take me to a room I can lay down in  
and let me hear the songs they sing  
or quiet my mind – let me hear softly  
the simple song you're whispering<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas I am largely repulsed by the side-effects of "Manifest Destiny", there is strong sense in which the phrase reflects how we must live intentionally, in a way that changes ourselves, our families, our friends, and our world for the better. Becoming a father has helped me realize the power of trust and agency—when we know God, and his love and character of God, we can act. If my son, Leif, always came to me with a sense of apprehension, as if he didn't know if he'd get permission to do something, or always felt like he was starting from ground zero, and didn't show that he knew me and my love for him, it would make me sad. But he learns (through his imperfect father) that I trust him more and more, and that I love him, and that he knows how he can act from that place of knowing. It is similar for us, I think.

<sup>2</sup> I must remind myself to live out of the great wealth I have been given in God, beyond my past and my missteps along the way.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:25-34

<sup>4</sup> When I become overly concerned with the passage of time, things that are yet undone, things that I want to do with my life, I remember the words of Jesus in John 15:1-17, and that all of life is to abide in him, and him in me, and that I will bear much fruit—that without him I can do nothing. It is a simple truth that gives perspective and clarity to the purpose of life, beyond the day-to-day complications and unknowing.

<sup>5</sup> Song of Songs 1:4b

## EIGHT LONG MONTHS<sup>1</sup>

Eight long months with nothing showing  
With not one coming & in the swelter nothing growing  
July's heat brought us to our knees  
But we're still crawling

When the Spring came with rain,  
it came all at once in a down pour  
And the hail came with,  
with all its knives & its fists and left our garden sore  
Their heads looked down  
& their backs bent over like orphans  
And I wondered if what I planted in the ground  
had any chance of becoming what I'm hoping

Nine long months – we just returned from a wedding  
Things like these make me think of where we're heading  
The heart's trapeze has no comfort of the netting  
But the tears that are shed in a drought  
are more precious for the letting

And the Fall came gentle  
and the blossoms that were wrinkled began to open  
And the August that had pressed on us so hard  
September had broken  
So prune it off – we'll see  
Or pull them up if no fruit is setting  
Because the Fall is here  
and because the garden'd be fairer for replanting

December comes – and a baby is awakened  
And frost may fall, but our hope wasn't taken  
And the summer earth was dormant  
But the winter fruit is persevering

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<sup>1</sup> We were told, after our son's semi-dramatic birth, that we "should probably think about not having more children". But after a couple years of shock, seeking further medical advice, seeing genetic doctors, sending our blood to Wisconsin, getting negative (which was good) test results, etc., our experience was labelled a mystery. We decided we would take one year, starting in January, to try to have another child. I started writing this song in the eighth month, in the middle of a hard drought, and finished it in December, when we at last found out that we were pregnant.

## CITY<sup>1</sup>

City of gold, city of face  
city of love, city – no base  
city undone, city low play  
city street-drunk, city turns none away

And we saw through our windows  
every door where the men go

She was low cut, she was dumb-faced  
a ribbon of lust wherever she lay  
see her undone, see her freeze-frame  
see her drunk li(m)p<sup>2</sup>, see her tease play

And we watch still  
as she goes downhill

City hangs out where the beasts sway  
City's passed out in the hallway  
Before she fell down what did she say?  
“I haven't seen a bird in twenty-three of these days”<sup>3</sup>

To say we told her so was no thrill  
But we don't mind a quiet kill<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The alternate title for this song was “Peorusalem” which combines the name of the city of Peor, found in Exodus, with the city of Jerusalem. It overlays the picture of a city with a woman, a harlot, and comes nearest to symbolically depicting the global system of supply and demand of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

<sup>2</sup> I sing these two words interchangeably here.

<sup>3</sup> The number of days is unimportant, but the absence of birds here is intended to show a disconnect between her and, perhaps, Dickinson's “Hope is the thing with feathers”. The city, especially the mega-city, can have a tendency to push out the vital reality and goodness of nature in our lives. She is far from life.

<sup>4</sup> Human trafficking exists and will continue as long as there exists the appetite for it and a general social blindness (or apathy) to it. We must seek to love these as God has loved us (“that while we were enemies of God, Christ died for us”), and pray that the Spirit of God would awaken hearts and move and dismantle systems of subjection and oppression that sustain the global slave trade—and we must do what we can.

## APOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

Sorry love,  
I didn't mean to hurt you, I apologize  
I love your hands<sup>2</sup>  
Please come out,  
out from behind the red holly tree<sup>3</sup>  
I'll prune their horns

Foolish tongue  
Speak kindly to a lady, your ever-wife,  
And wash her arms<sup>4</sup>  
Holy light—  
See it — through the window of her skin  
A mirror shines<sup>5</sup>

Sorry, love—  
I didn't mean to hurt you, I apologize  
Know I love you

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<sup>1</sup> This song was written immediately after a poor communication of something with my wife. We highly value communication, and we highly value each other, but sometimes, and often unintentionally, words can be spoken in a way that hurt the other. We have found that humility and the willingness to open our hearts to each other and forgive are most often the road to reconciliation.

<sup>2</sup> My wife is one of the most naturally creative people I know. The topic of my poor communication touched on something she had been working on. Her hands here represent her creativity.

<sup>3</sup> In the house where I was born, we had a red holly bush growing up against front of the house. They're nice decorative bushes, because they're evergreen, but they're a tough lot and no fun to touch. I think I was recalling this image when I figuratively tucked my wife behind one in this song. They were close to our home, but they were painful, much like a word poorly spoken, which she could have chosen to keep between us.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:25-33, This passage is one of the most helpful reminders to me of the power of our words to one another. Here, he speaks of "washing her with the water of the word". When we water each other with unkind words, or when we withhold kind words, our hearts are like little plants that can get sick or wither. But when we speak in kindness to each other, and are generous with words, it's like rain to a thirsty plant, and we blossom.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 34:5

## I USED TO THINK<sup>1</sup>

I used to think that we would never know enough<sup>2</sup>  
that we were caught between a shadow and a bluff  
a scent so fleeting, so misleading, us  
a storm cloud's passion  
spirit, ashes, us

We can sink our teeth in whatever fare we want  
we can fill our rooms<sup>3</sup>  
or leave them vacant, waiting  
endless options, rooms of boxes, us  
filled or empty,  
feigned or living, us

And when we cross the street  
and leave the salesmen wagging tongues  
behind the cemetery field  
is the wild open  
we were meant to be a tributary running down  
cause the valley's meant to be  
to be filled with children

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<sup>1</sup> In my journal, when trying for myself to sort out the story and themes of this song, I wrote a theme next to each verse. Next to the first, I wrote "Indecision", next to the second, I wrote "Choice", and next to the third, I wrote "Death & Purpose".

<sup>2</sup> My mind is so often compelled to know, to find out, to discover. On one hand, I enjoy this—it is a pleasure and an adventure to apprehend things, and in the learning of things, there is infinite running room. But sometimes I am driven without pleasure or purpose. Something like fear or anxiety pulls me. This line refers to the my own futile attempts to try to uncover a mystery by trying to emotionally blackmail God, and to the understanding that we are kept in indecision so long as we demand full understanding before we can act.

<sup>3</sup> The imagery of this verse was furnished by a quote from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* and was shared by a good friend of mine: "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skillful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic."

## MONARCH

Afternoon, when I saw your cocoon hanging silent<sup>1</sup>  
Won't be here in the dark of the year when the light's spent  
and bent over a misshapen earth  
Bottled up in a drinking cup, I hold and watch you  
As the summer yawns and autumn blankets my lawn  
What will time do to you?

Restless fingers, clenched fists, now, now – is it time yet?  
Raising brows, counting down, now, now – is it time yet?

And when the summer lifts and the evenings are brisk you will turn south  
And the same turns that the monarch learns  
from the wind's mouth, will they lift me?<sup>2</sup>

Morning and the dawn of your wings comes too slowly for me  
You tap and you twist but your tough chrysalis is still holding, it seems  
But the trick of the stall is you won't get out at all without the struggling  
You've got to be strong cause it won't be long till you're flying

To see the orange ocean  
with black and white flickered songs  
The dream of meeting brothers that I have never known  
Is calling me out  
The sea of flame and flutter  
the yearn to belong  
The first rip in the darkness, and the sense of my home  
is calling me out

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<sup>1</sup> Once, on a nature walk by myself, I found a raised spot and sat to rest. After a time, I noticed a little pine needle cocoon that would tap and sway intermittently. I watched for a while and eventually made up my mind that it was a moth or butterfly trying to get out. And since it was having trouble, I decided to help it. I carefully tore the end off of the cocoon and waited for the little thing to emerge. I waited for a long time, but nothing crawled out, and there were no longer any little movements. I eventually left, thinking but not knowing that I had done something I shouldn't have, and only later found out that my "help" had likely killed the little occupant. My only consolation was learning that it had been a bagworm moth.

<sup>2</sup> As the monarch butterflies flew over in the fall, following some instinctual sense of direction, I wondered at how we humans can seem so directionless. We wonder what we're meant for—our destiny, what to do with our lives, for our work, in love.... There is an endless swirl of ideas and strategies about how to live and eat and exercise and find our purpose. Squirrels seem like they spend less time finding their purpose in life.... But our human instinct goes beyond finding food & a mate. It seems that our inner drive is for finding meaning, for creating, and for connection, for knowing and being known by others.

## MORNING DOVE

She's<sup>1</sup> awake in the morning  
long before I ever stir<sup>2</sup>  
she's hungry for the oil and the water  
and the flour gets rolled for the bread<sup>3</sup>

She has ears for the birdsong  
that decorates the darkest blue<sup>4</sup>  
her voice is in her hands and the whispering  
is her song in the hours before the sun is due

She moves out through the morning  
while the stars still wander  
over streets, over houses  
she pulls a blanket  
and the dew of her feet is a washing

She looks into our faces  
with the love that she's received<sup>5</sup>  
and bestows it on us like a white carnation  
the well of her heart is a clear spring<sup>6</sup>

She sees God in the sunrise  
that paints the roofs of everything  
she runs with the wind of the morning  
she taps on my window and I'm awake

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<sup>1</sup> I had thought of retitling this song, but felt the current one to be the best fit. The "she" that it speaks of is a composite of my wife, my daughter, Woman, Wisdom of the book of Proverbs, the woman from the last chapter of Proverbs, and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> On a day without appointment or work to wake us, my wife will, nine times out of ten, wake before me.

<sup>3</sup> I count the oil, bread, and water here as both realities and symbols.

<sup>4</sup> The many moods and colors of the sky are all fascinating, but the deep blue of morning and evening is one of my favorites.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:19 says "We love, because he first loved us."

<sup>6</sup> "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Proverbs 4:23

## TIME, MY TETHER

Time, my tethered umbilical cord, is a rope  
to the places and people I am living for and to my hope  
Disconnects me from my longings and from my home  
Sees me come and go on little voyages – distant shores

Sing

Breath of our lungs – like wetted paper cups – contract  
and expand in their dual little witnesses of the facts  
Are my words watering the roots of your heart,  
or is there lack?  
Cause the birds we're setting free daily out of our mouths  
come back

Sing

I heard it say: All flesh is grass  
It devours with a mouth that never fasts  
Do we build our lives on anything that lasts?

Time for seven billion<sup>1</sup> of us to learn love in place  
of the gentle caress and ease of wickedness – saving face  
Time for these drying bodies to jump in, get wet  
Cause the river is rushing – wants to swallow us –  
the river of death<sup>2</sup>

Sing

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<sup>1</sup> With the world population humming along, this line will soon be out of date. The United Nations estimates that we will hit 8 billion living souls around 2025, and 9 billion before 2050.

<sup>2</sup> From the book of Matthew: "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'" And in John, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

## MEANT<sup>1</sup>

Teach me your heart  
Show me where to find  
all the secrets there  
the ones you know are mine

Let's take this risk  
that says our love is young<sup>2</sup>  
that says we're foolish  
Let's prove them wrong

Cause I was meant to love you  
the way you should be loved

Place your hand in mine  
for the love and friendship there  
Let's adventure out  
past the arcing line<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup>He said: Follow this one thing  
Love one another  
as I have loved you  
as I died for you

When we bow our heads  
nevermore to wake  
our love's a garland there  
whose flowers never fade

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the few songs where I sat down and wrote the whole song in one go (though, as I look back over the songs, "Monarch" and "These Are the Days"—and the verses of "Snow"—are other examples). An even rarer lot are songs which I improvised, words and music, and kept them as they were (they are "Woken Up" and "The Grass after Winter").

<sup>2</sup> I wrote this song in 2012, five years into our marriage. Some of our friends were getting married and had asked us to play in their wedding. I held these two holy moments in mind as I wrote.

<sup>3</sup> Or, horizon.

<sup>4</sup> John 13 & Ephesians 5

## NO ANSWERS

There are no answers in the pages  
Endless lines where we wait<sup>1 2</sup>  
And our hands plow the furrows  
Sketching lines on our face

And I long for you  
down roads they'd walk me through  
But I have grown tired,  
tired of endless guessing  
My love, I look for you

There are no answers in these pages  
Only lines where we wait  
And I stuff my ears to listen  
Close my eyes to your gaze  
Do I cast my lots with all,  
all I have known?  
Do I refuse the call  
that brings me back home?

And I've tossed and turned upon these questions  
I've piled like stones to throw  
I raise my arm, you raise the invitation:  
To be loved is to know<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am usually reading something. Sometimes, whether reading a short story or the Scriptures, I'll intentionally or unintentionally want them to tell me what to do, to give me direction. I err, hungry that they should give me a playbook for my life. I don't believe that books, or even the Bible, were meant for this purpose. So many words, lines, magazines, news, books, etc., are written and published and being published. And in most of them, there is some wisdom (though often hidden). I just finished *To Kill a Mockingbird* and wept, and felt so thankful for the gift of getting to read Harper Lee's story (for the third time). But in light of the poverty and riches of books, I consider that they are rich where they are like a bridge, connecting us directly or indirectly with the person of Jesus. This song is a picture of my struggle to find life in mere books.

<sup>2</sup> John 5:39-40: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

<sup>3</sup> We go about it in the wrong way, I think, when our goal is the intellectual satisfaction of knowing something. There are some things we cannot see when we stand off from God and demand answers. If you want to get to know me, trust is involved. And there are some things that we can only understand, when we first allow ourselves to be loved by God—some things we can only see from the Father's lap.

## DEEP DEEP<sup>1</sup>

God of the universe  
I look into the darkest part and  
find a billion stars

c'mon how'd you fill that space  
so many tiny tiny things<sup>2</sup>  
things in me  
things I don't see  
big and small  
far and near  
and climbing closer to the stars  
I want to look deep, deep into your heart

God of the universe  
I look into the darkest part and  
find a billion stars

And all the times I tried to get close  
you say the kingdom of God is in you baby, baby, baby<sup>3</sup>

God of the universe  
I look into the darkest part and  
find a billion stars

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<sup>1</sup> There are few images, in my mind, that are as literally unfathomable as the Hubble Deep Field image (see it & read more about it here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble\\_Deep\\_Field](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Deep_Field)). It was made by assembling several long exposures of a tiny portion of the night sky, from a patch of space that contains only a few visible stars. Hidden in the apparent darkness are thousands of galaxies. The one we live in is called the Milky Way Galaxy, one of a seemingly innumerable amount in the Universe. And yet, the story of the Messiah is "God with us." The song is a meditation inspired by this incomprehensible image and the space & distance that separate and connect us.

<sup>2</sup> Looking the other direction, inside our bodies, and the cells and matter we are made of, is an equally dizzying act, with all of our independently working parts, our autonomic nervous system, and all of the little creatures that help us digest our food (see gut flora).

<sup>3</sup> Luke 17:20-21

## TONIGHT

Watch me here  
alone on the porch<sup>1</sup>  
with my heart  
flickering like a torch  
Do you love me tonight?  
Do you love me tonight?  
You're so far away

Little king  
awake in his head  
hard to sleep  
when the queen's not in bed  
Know I love you tonight  
Know I wait for the light  
the light of your face

When you come home  
we'll sing in the dark  
illuminate  
with a harmony spark  
Wear a white dress tonight<sup>2</sup>  
Wear a white dress tonight  
and say you're in love

I'll sleep for now  
with a yawn and a sigh  
hum a tune  
to remember you by  
Oh, I love you tonight  
Oh, I love you tonight  
My darling, my wife

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<sup>1</sup> I wrote this song shortly after the birth of our daughter. My wife and our daughter were still in the hospital, spending just over two weeks there before they were allowed to come home. I had put our son to bed and brought the guitar with me to the porch, where I sat and penned the song.

<sup>2</sup> My wife was within the walls of the hospital for those two weeks with almost no breaks, and was not, at this point, aspiring to wear dresses. In light of her real situation, this line is humorous to me, but the plea of it is metaphorical. The white dress is a symbol for our wedding, a remembrance that she is still my beautiful bride, and that I hoped, under the fluorescent lights of room 2145, she would still know and feel my love for her. Sweet, sweet premature baby love.

# HEIMWEH<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

## 10 FUN FACTS ABOUT MONARCH (or, the first ten things that come to mind...)

1. I lost 10 pounds while recording this album. My guess is focus.
2. We recorded almost all of it in the side room of our house, between the hours of 8pm and 1am.
3. My wife, Lane, was more a part of this album than any so far. She sang on five of the songs, and she was essential in the logistical side of getting this recorded, as technician. We spent many, many evenings, after our kids were asleep, piecing this album together.
4. I was very pleased that the title *Monarch* would contain one of our daughter's most used nicknames, Mona.
5. In the song "Deep Deep", you can, if you listen closely, hear one our beloved tornado sirens sounding its Saturday noon test siren.
6. I wrote the song "Snow" on ukulele, which did not occur to me as ironic until later. However, I did not associate my last name with the season until a few years ago.
7. Alternate titles were *Persevera*, *Daughter*, *Answer*, *Deep Deep*, and *Fidelity*, to name a few.
8. While recording cello for the song "Monarch", Jeremy almost fell asleep. The session ended shortly after his admission of extreme drowsiness.
9. The booth we used to record in (our "recording fort") was composed of an upright futon, the mattress from our sleeper sofa, a filing cabinet, an old mattress from a friend, an upright piano, an assortment of blankets, and a sheep skin.
10. Due to some vocal pain towards the end of tracking vocals for this album, I started, for the first time in my life, warming up my voice. That consisted of singing scales, humming along as I played piano, drinking lots of tea and water, doing sirens, not pushing it, and relaxing my face. My singing stamina and comfort were greatly improved.

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<sup>1</sup> "Heimweh" is a German word that means "home-sickness" (and corresponds inversely to fernweh).