

*Paige Powell Music Blog for April 1, 2020:*

## *The Story Behind the Song, "Shakespeare Sonnet XCI"*

One summer meeting of the **Songwriter's Toolbox in 2017**, the president of the **Songwriters' Association of Washington (SAW)**, Jay Keating, presented us with a songwriting challenge. He had recently visited the **Folger Shakespeare Library downtown in Washington, D.C.** and they seemed open to a concert\* of songwriters who could present songs they wrote to **the sonnets of William Shakespeare**. Jay said that they thought it would be a great way to generate interest in Shakespeare's works, especially among young people.



I gave some serious thought to Jay's assignment and while visiting my mother in Orlando, asked if she had a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets. She was an English major and had earned her Masters degree from the University of Maryland, with an annotated bibliography of Emily Brontë which was published and purchased by many public libraries. She handed me her black leather-bound "*Complete Works of Shakespeare*" which she had kept from her early undergraduate days of college. There were light marks of comments in pencil in some of the margins, and it was marvelous to hold something of my mother's that existed before I was born.

Shakespeare's sonnets were at the back of my mother's book, and as I read through them, I was disappointed to find how depressing they were. When I came to **Sonnet XCI (number 91)**, I was glad to find some positive love poetry — although the end was pretty gut-wrenching with, "*Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take all this away, and me most wretched make*" Poor William! He deeply knew when writing about love, that love can be really painful when it is not returned.

When I wrote the music to Sonnet XCI, I tried to keep it in a **style appropriate for the 16th century**, with a madrigal 3/4 tempo (Waltz time signature). But I kept in mind that our young people today really like rap and hip-hop styles for music, so I double-timed the second stanza, giving the song a "lift" and pleasant surprise for the listener. **In songwriting, it's all about keeping the listener (that's YOU) engaged.** You can hear the song for free by clicking on the little triangle next to the words "Hear the Song" at the top of the song's page (*click on the title*): "*Shakespeare Sonnet XCI*" Unfortunately, CD Baby has closed their store, so you can only buy it through Apple Music, but it's also available on Spotify and other music places. Hey, let me know if you find it elsewhere. Just reply to this email.

Although I finally recorded the song in September, 2019 and released it at the end of January, 2020, I waited until TODAY to promote it, because **today is Shakespeare's birthday!** Yes, he was born April 1, 1564 in the Elizabethan age, a time when England was prosperous under the leadership of Queen Elizabeth I (the first). For an interesting album cover for this song, I added my face to the painting, "*Elizabeth I when a Princess*" ca. 1546 by William Scrots, using Adobe Photoshop, just for fun.