EMILY:
A SONG CYCLE FOR SOPRANO AND CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
ON POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON

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by

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I owe gratitude to Harvard University Press, which has allowed me use of Thomas H. Johnson's edition of Emily Dickinson. This edition returns Dickinson's poems to her clean, idiosyncratic originals, shaving off the “cleaning” done by unscrupulous turn-of-the-century editors.

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PROGRAM NOTE

After contemplating the standard orchestral work for my master's thesis, I decided to take my idea song cycle for soprano and piano of Emily Dickinson poems and make it a thesis-sized work. It was written with Panorámicos in mind, which is a wonderful Cleveland-area chamber ensemble that is a force for lush, new music. Their modified Pierrot-ensemble instrumentation has made for an interesting challenge, which, like Schoenberg's famous work or Boulez's similar attempt, has led me to use structures that change instrumentation for each song. Each song is linked to the surrounding ones via a short solo or duo by various members of the ensemble.

The structure of the poems creates a two-fold story. After the introductory "I'm Nobody!," songs two through seven mourn the loss of man, a lover or husband. "'Tis not that Dying" explores the difficulties of living after a loved-one's death. "Success" contemplates the pain of failure through the image of a man dying on a battlefield just as the battle was won. "Heart!" has the poet and her heart attempting to forget the dead man, and failing. "Morning?" questions the return to everyday life after this loss. "Sire - two Legacies' emancipates the pain and sadness brought on by death. "To know just how He suffered" tenderly questions what was on the man's mind as he died (I read "He" in this poem as Jesus on the cross; whether my music does the same is a different matter). Songs eight through twelve mourn the loss of a female, more specifically, I think a daughter. "She died" is as straight-forward as the title implies. "I lost a World" takes the same loss and explores it through the image of the world. I can't help but draw the implication of a lost child, as most children are the world to their parents. "If I should cease" tells the deceased why she would stop visiting her grave. "When Roses cease to bloom, Sir," refers to the speaker's impending death. "Tie the Strings to my Life" is the journey of the poet from life to death (following her husband and daughter). "New feet within my garden go -" is a postlude that explores the ambivalence of the continually renewing world. There is a sweet tone to this final poem, but also sadness as the seasons continue beyond her life.

INSTRUMENTATION

Soprano
Flute
Oboe
Viola
Cello
Piano

PERFORMANCE NOTE

After a slight pause, each link between the songs begin in the same tempo of the previous song. Each one moves directly into the following song, the ones so marked ritardando or accelerando to the new song's tempo. All of the links have an air of freedom in comparison to the strict tempos of the songs. Although there are brief silences, the feeling of attacca should be maintained at all times.
EMILY: A SONG CYCLE FOR SOPRANO AND CHAMBER ENSEMBLE ON POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON (55pp.)

Director of Thesis: Frank Wiley

Emily is a setting of thirteen poems of Emily Dickinson for soprano with flute, oboe, viola, cello, and piano. It is approximately thirty minutes in duration. Each song has a base instrumentation of soprano and piano. The cycle starts and ends with songs featuring the entire group, while the center song is for only soprano and piano. Each of the other songs has its own instrumentation that adds one or two instruments to the soprano and piano. Each possible instrument combination is used only once, and the combinations have been arranged to achieve an even distribution throughout the cycle. Between the clearly defined songs are solo or duo passages that link them together.
Emily Dickinson

Emily

1. I'm Nobody! Who are you?


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I’m No - bod - y!

pp sempre

_ pedal ad lib.

Who are you? Are you— No - bod - y— Too?

more questioning

poco cresc.

questioning
Then there's a pair of us! Don't tell! They'd advertise —

Joyous, you know!
How drea - ry to be - Some bod - y!

announcing

How

pedal ad lib.

How

public - like a Frog -

to tell one's name - the live-long June -
To an admiring __ Bog!

\textit{PP pointed}

\textbf{mf}
2. 'Tis not that Dying hurts us so –

'Holding back $q = 50$

Soprano

'Holding back $q = 50$

p halting smoother direct

Piano

pp sempre

no pedal

Liv- ing – hurts us more –

But Dying – is a dif - ferent way –
A Kind behind the Door —

pedal ad lib.

That subdued Southern custom of the
Bird – That ere the Frosts are due –

mf

less restrained

Ac - cepts a bet - ter Lat - i -
We are the Birds that stay.

The Shiv’ers round

precise, yet dull in tone
the Farmers' doors – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

For more clear whose re – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

doors – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

For whose re – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

_pp more clear

doors – – – – – – – – – – – – – –

For whose re – – – – – – – – – – – – – –
We stipulate—

luc tant—

Crumb—

p exact

We stipulate—
till pitying Snows

Per

ravishing

Persuade

14
3. Success is counted sweetest

**Flute**

**Oboe**

**Soprano**

**Piano**

Dancing \( \downarrow = 72 \)

f **powerful** pedal ad lib.

f **firm**

Success is counted sweetest By those who ne'er succeeded.

To comprehend a nectar Requires

simile
sor est need. Ah.

Not one of all the pur - ple Host

do

Who took the flag to - day.

Can tell the
poco cresc.

**Definition**

So clear of Victory

**trumpeting**

And deflated

On

**p**

* sing these two ties as if there were a suspension on the downbeat.
whose forbidden ear

The strain

striving

The triumph

Burst

organized and
clear!

crisp

fluid and dejected

Ah.
4. Heart! We will forget him!

Rolling \( \frac{3}{4} = 68 \)

Soprano

Heart! We will forget him!

Piano

\( \text{no pedal} \)
You and I—tonight! You may forget the warmth he gave— I will forget the light!
When you have done, pray tell me

That I may straight begin!
Haste!

lest while you're lag - ging——

I re - mem - ber

more urgently

exasperated

Kent"
5. Will there really be a "Morning"?
such a thing as "Day"?  Could I see it from the mountains.  If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like Water-lilies?

Has it feathers like a Bird?

Is it...
brought from famous countries, Of which I have never heard? Oh! some Scholar! Oh! some Sailor! Oh! some Wise Man
from the skies! Please to tell a lit-tle-

Pilgrim—Where the place called "Morning"—lies!

accel.

pedal ad lib.
You left me – Sire – two Legacies –

pedal on attacks, complete silence on rests

A Leg - a-ey of Love
A Heav-en-ly Fa-ther would suf-fice
Had He the of-fer of—
You left me Bound'ries of Pain—

Ca-pa-cious as the Sea—
Be-tween E-ter-ni-ty—
no cresc.
and Time
Your Consciousness

more hushed
and Me

Flute
Oboe
7. To know just how He suffered – would be dear –

Flute

Oboe

Soprano

Piano

Flowing \( \cdot = 62 \)

\( \text{mf struggling} \)

\( \text{pedal ad lib.} \)

To

\( \text{poco a poco cresc.} \)

know just how He suffered – would be dear –

To

know if any human eyes were near –

To

poco a poco cresc.
more and more agitated

whom he could entrust—his wavering gaze—Until it settled broad—On

Paradise—To know if He was patient—

wondering part content—Was dying as He thought or different

more directly; moved hoping

Was it a pleasant Day to die—And did the Sun shine—face His
way –

What

was His furthest mind –

Or

what the Distant say –

disconnecting

Such a Day –

more philosophical
And wishes

Had He An y

Just His

sparkling

pp sempre

no pedal

more and more knowing

poco a poco cresc.

Sigh –

Accent ed

Had been leg i ble –

to

Me –

And was He con fi dent

un til

Ill flut ered out –

In

Ev er last ing

Well –

pedal ad lib.
And if He spoke – What name was Best – What

last What One broke off with At the

Drows est –

lean on downbeats

Was He afraid – or tranquil

as before
Might He know How Con-scious

more and more expansive

grow -

Meet -

poco a poco dim.

and the Junc -

tion, be

E -

p

p

pp
8. She died – *this* was the way she died.
And more stoic when her breath was done Took up her simple ward robe
And started for the sun. Her bittersweet little...
figure at the gate. The Angels must have spied, Since I could never—

find her. Up—on the mortal side.

barreling towards raging grief

Ah, poco a poco cresc.
9. I lost a World – the other day!

Dizzy \( j = 144 \)

Viola

\( \text{ff} \)  
\( \text{nf} \)

Dizzy \( j = 144 \)

Soprano

\( f \)  
\( \text{f over whel med} \)

\( I \text{ lost a World the other day! Has Any body} \)

You'll know it by the Row of Stars

Piano

\( \text{ff} \)  
\( \text{p} \)

pedal ad lib.

A round its forehead bound.

40
A Rich man—might not notice it—
Yet—to my frugal Eye, Of more Esteem than Ducats—
Oh distraught find it—Sir—for me!
10. If I should cease to bring a Rose

If I should cease to bring a Rose

on a festive day, 'Twill be because beyond the

Lugubrious \( \dot{=} 72 \)

Oboe

Viola

Cello

Soprano

Piano

Lugubrious \( \dot{=} 72 \)

pp reserved
Rose
I have been called
a way – –
( pp sempre )

If more reserved
I should cease to take the names
My
more and more disgust
buds com-mem-o-rate-
Twill be be-cause Death's

fin-ger-
Clasps my mur-m'ring lip!

Flute
11. When Roses cease to bloom, Sir,

When Roses cease to bloom, Sir, And Violets are done –

When Bumble-bees in solemn flight Have passed beyond the Sun –

The hand that paused to gather Up on this Summer's day Will idle lie – In
Aurora – Then take my flowers – pray!

Haste \( q. = 100 \)

12. Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord,

Flute

Viola

Cello

Soprano

Piano

pedal ad lib.
Life, My Lord, Then, I am ready to go! Just a

look at the Horses— Rapid!— That will do!
Put me in on the firm - est side –

So I shall nev - er fall – For we must ride to the Judg - ment –
And its partly, down Hill—
But never I mind the steepest—And never I mind the Sea—Held fast in ever-lasting Race—
By my own choice, and Thee –

Good-bye to the Life I used to live – And the world I used to know –
And kiss the Hills, for me, just once –

Then – I am ready to go!

doce

Oboe

rit.
from another world, with a hint of sadness

feet within my garden go –

New fingers stir the
A Trou-badour up-on the Elm

Be-trays the sol-i-tude.

New children play up.
on the green – New Weary sleep be low – And still the pensive –

Spring returns – And still the punctual snow!