University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/14/2013

I, Mary E. Crawford , hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Voice.

It is entitled:

Dickinson Sings: A Study of a Selection of Lori Laitman's Settings for High Voice

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UNIVERSITY OF Cincinnati

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Dickinson Sings: A Study of a Selection of Lori Laitman's Settings for High Voice and Piano

A document submitted to the

Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

in the Performance Studies Division
of the College-Conservatory of Music
Voice

by

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Abstract

Crawford, Mary Elizabeth. *Dickinson Sings: A Study of a Selection of Lori Laitman's Settings for High Voice and Piano.*
Doctor of Musical Arts Document, University of Cincinnati, 2013.

This document explores "Four Dickinson Songs," "Between the Bliss and Me," and "One Bee and Revery," by American song composer Lori Laitman. These song cycles are all settings of Emily Dickinson poetry, Laitman's most frequently set poet. This document examines themes found within Dickinson's poetry according to a biographical and historical context and evaluates their presence within the poetry chosen for Ms. Laitman's cycles. Most specifically, it provides a study for these cycles through the exploration of Dickinson's poetry, interviews with Lori Laitman, and attention to musical elements specific to each song. Furthermore, it provides a compilation of all Lori Laitman's settings of Emily Dickinson poetry. This document gives valuable information for performing these song cycles, guiding performers to a deeper interpretation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my teacher, advisor, and friend, Dr. Barbara Paver. Thank you for all of your encouragement throughout this degree. I know that I am a better musician, teacher, and singer because of you. I would also like to thank Professor Karen Lykes and Dr. Gwendolyn Detweiler for their direction and advice in the creation of this document.

I would also like to thank Lori Laitman for writing this inspirational music. I am forever grateful for the time you took to provide thoughtful answers to my questions. In addition, thank you for permission to use your musical scores for my musical examples within this document.

I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to my husband Luke. Thank you for the countless nights that you had to cook, clean, put Aubrey to sleep, wash clothes, and get lunches ready for the next work day, just so I could study and finish this document. I am forever grateful for your support and belief in me.

To Aubrey-Many days I felt that I could not finish this degree and then I would look at you and know that it was possible, and that I would. As Emily Dickinson so eloquently stated "I gained it so--- By Climbing slow--- By Catching at the Twigs that grow, Between the Bliss--- and me---." My wish for you is that you find and follow your "Bliss", whatever that may be.

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CHAPTER ONE

LORI LAITMAN

Lori Laitman: Biographical Information

Lori Laitman has been described as a composer with "limitless range of inflections, which stems from the even more limitless possibilities to be found in the world of words and ideas to which she is so devoted."[1] With over two hundred songs to her name, Laitman is widely recognized as one of America's most prolific living composers of art song.[2] Known for her ability to write songs that display poetry in a clear manner without compromising her compositional aesthetic, her melodies remain unique yet memorable. [3]

Laitman (b. 1955) was born in Long Beach, New York. She received her Bachelor's degree, magna cum laude, with honors in music and Master of Music degree in flute performance from The Yale School of Music. Ms. Laitman began her academic music career as a flutist, but gradually moved towards composition. In her "Informal Biography,"[4]she explains inspiration for writing vocal music began with life-long friendships with artists. Soprano Lauren Wagner, who roomed with

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[1] Gregory Berg, "Within These Spaces: Songs of Lori Laitman," *Journal of Singing* 66, no. 3 (Jan/Feb 2010): 370.

[2] Lori Laitman, "Biography," http://artsongs.com/faq/category/general (accessed June 11, 2012).

[3] Berg,"Within These Spaces," 370.

[4] Lori Laitman, "The Accidental Vocal Composer," http://artsongs.com/informal-biography/(accessed June 11, 2012).

Laitman at Interlochen, was the first to premier many of Laitman's songs. This creative relationship became a vital force in securing Laitman as a song composer. [5]

In addition to art song, Laitman has composed music for chamber orchestra, chorus, various instruments, and a couple of small staged works. Ms. Laitman's opera *The Scarlet Letter*, based on the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne with libretto by David Mason, and was to receive its professional debut during Opera Colorado's 2013 season featuring Elizabeth Futral, James Valenti and Morgan Smith as principal cast members.[6] However, because of unforeseen financial difficulties, this has been postponed to 2015.[7] The opera was commissioned by The University of Central Arkansas in 2007 and premiered at the university in 2008. The collaborative relationship between Laitman and Mason began in 2004 when she set his poem *Swimmers on the Shore* commissioned by the West Chester University Poetry Conference.[8] She is currently setting a selection of Mason's poetry for a newly commissioned song cycle for soprano Julia Broxholm and pianist Russell Miller. Their partnership is another example of Laitman's commitment to forming lasting collaborative relationships.

Nurturing artistic relationships has been critical throughout Ms. Laitman's career. This is also evidenced by her commissioned works, which form the majority

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Laitman, email message to author, March 16, 2013.

[8] The Scarlett Letter Opera website, http://scarletletteropera.squarespace.com/history (accessed July 7, 2012).

of her output. In order to involve the commissioner in the creative process, Laitman confers with the commissioner about dramatic intention and possible poets and/or poems that could be of interest.[9] For instance, Dr. Adelaide Whitaker has commissioned several of her songs and says "the results are invariably wonderful…her [Laitman's] work embodies a continuation of the great art song tradition. The songs express the values of our time and all time. And…they are beautiful."[10] Whitaker's commissions from Laitman include the song cycles *One or Two Things*, *Round and Round*, *Between the Bliss and Me*, *Early Snow*, and *Sunflowers*, *Men With Small Heads*, and *The Joy of Uncreating*.

Most recently, Ms. Laitman has been commissioned to write a one act children's opera titled *The Three Feathers* by the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. Virginia Tech and Opera Roanoke are partners for the production. Laitman's librettist for this opera is former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Dana Gioia. They too have a spanning history of collaborating together, as she has set many of Gioia poems to music. [11]

Over the past decade, Laitman's songs have grown in popularity and have been programmed with greater frequency. This is partially due to her recordings and collaborations with established artists. Laitman's songs have been the topic of many articles in the *Journal of* Singing. Due to the journal's large readership, these articles have introduced teachers and students to these songs, resulting in scholastic

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[9] Laitman website, "FAQ, general."

[10] Laitman website, "Reviews and Quotes."

[11] Laitman, email from author, March 17, 2013.

assignments and performances. Laitman has released four solo CDs to critical acclaim. Gregory Berg, Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Carthage, has provided numerous reviews of Laitman's recordings for the NATS *Journal of Singing.* In reviewing *Within These Spaces: Songs of Lori Laitman*, Berg states:

> One hundred years hence, when critics look back at the art songs of our era, there will be many fine composers to laud and applaud, but few will deserve higher praise than Lori Laitman. With nearly 200 songs already to her credit, there seems to be not the slightest diminishment in the expressive impact of her writing of the bracing originality of her ideas.[12]

Laitman's educational background, lasting artistic relationships with artists and commissioners, and her positive reviews have helped the achievement of a thriving career as a composer. Although these elements have greatly contributed to her success, Laitman's distinctive compositional voice has made her one of the most popular living art song composers. When considering Laitman's song output, one must examine her compositional techniques and artistic style.

Compositional Techniques and Style

When describing Lori Laitman's style, Carol Kimball writes "It is clear Laitman has a remarkable gift for setting words to music. In this, her work embodies a continuation of the great art song traditions of the past. "[13] Her smooth, lyric melodies within the context of a rich harmonic tapestry have caused many to compare her to composer Ned Rorem. By examining Laitman's melodic and

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[12] Berg,"Within These Spaces," 369.

[13] Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song, Style and Literature*, revised edition (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2005), 340.

harmonic writing, piano writing, and text setting, one can discover the hallmarks of Laitman's style.

Because much of Laitman's music contains multiple harmonic shifts, she rarely includes key signatures in her scores.[14] Dr. Carol Lines, Professor at McNeese State University, describes Laitman's music as "Neo Romantic" and notes that her "melodic writing consistently takes surprising and unpredictable direction, never abrupt, but smooth, pleasing and natural."[15] These unexpected changes within the melody and harmony serve the purpose of placing emphasis on the drama of the text. The tuneful simplicity of her melodies contribute to the contemporary, almost musical theater, quality in some of her songs. However, she always achieves this quality within the parameter of serious music. When describing her own compositional process, Laitman says:

> I compose the vocal line first, custom crafting the melody to emphasize what I consider important in each line, but also taking great care to set the words properly for the singer. This enables the singer to then communicate the words effectively to the audience…. I always have some idea of the harmonies when composing the vocal line, but I do not flesh out the accompaniment until the vocal line is complete. I typically craft the accompaniment to color the emotions behind the words, and all musical aspect (rhythm, textures, etc.) are chosen to add additional layers of interpretation to the poem itself. Each song thus becomes my musical interpretation of the poem. [16]

Laitman has a strong facility for composing for the voice and enhances the vocal line with her treatment of the piano. As Laitman mentions, she writes the melody before conquering the piano writing. Her piano writing provides

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[14] Laitman website,"FAQ."

[15] Carol Lines "The Songs of Lori Laitman," *Journal of* Singing 64, (2007): 32.

[16]Laitman website, "FAQ."

"commentary to the text."[17] Furthermore, the piano creates a dramatic mood, never detracting from the focus of the text.

As stated in many interviews, Laitman's primary concern is always the communication of the text. She says her "goal is to create dramatic music to express and magnify the meaning of the poem."[18] Common compositional techniques she uses are text painting, text repetition, and careful consideration of range. The clarity and simplicity in her melodic line enables the singer to clearly deliver the text.

The Holocaust is a topic which permeates much of Laitman's art song output. When cataloguing her art songs, it is conceivable to think of her songs in two distinct categories: songs about the Holocaust and songs on other subjects. To date, she has written several song cycles, art songs, an oratorio, and an opera commemorating the Holocaust. Music scholars and critics have responded specifically to these works. She admits that she is drawn to poetry regarding the Holocaust because of its profundity and magnificence.[19] Still, in spite of her large number of songs for the Holocaust, Laitman has set Emily Dickinson more than any other poet.

Connection with Dickinson

Lori Laitman has set Dickinson twenty-six times. In addition, she has set over seventy different poets, including Thomas Moore, Thomas Hardy, Mary Oliver, Sylvia Plath, Anne Ranasinghe, Joyce Sutphen, David Mason, and Sara Teasdale.

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[17] Lori Laitman, interview by author, email correspondence, October 17, 2012.

[18] Laitman website, "FAQ."

[19] Ibid.

When selecting poetry, Laitman says that she "has to feel an emotional connection to the poem."[20] Her "goal is to create dramatic music to express and magnify the meaning of the poem."[21] In her song cycles she aims to create an expressive arc, often causing her to search for contrasting moods within poetry. [22] Laitman chooses poems that deal with loss, grief, religion, philosophical questioning, innocence, love, and joy- texts that provide "great insight about the human condition."[23] It is no wonder that Laitman feels a strong connection to Emily Dickinson's poetry, as many of her poems deal with these same themes. In an interview conducted with the composer, she says, "Dickinson's poetry has always appealed to me for the beauty of her language and her striking vision, which I find so unique."[24]Carol Kimball explains that the allure of Dickinson's poetry, which many art song composers share, is her ability "to describe many states of human consciousness."[25] Dickinson's poems inspire Laitman to explore unique musical elements that distinguish these songs from her other settings. Carol Lines comments on what makes these settings unique in her article "Songs of Lori Laitman":

> In contrast to the long lyrical lines and poetic structural fidelity of the Teasdale songs, a great number of the Dickinson settings contain melismas,

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Berg, "Within These Spaces," 369.

[24] Laitman, interview by author.

[25] Carol Kimball, "Setting Emily," *Journal of Singing* 68, no. 4 (March/April 2012): 462.

> text repetitions, and syncopation. Frequent changes in meter add interest and unexpected accentuation to the metrical regularity of the writing of this poet. Poetic lines may be broken into sections that become short exclamatory phrases (for the more exuberant poems); at other time the lines are extended melodically. While the accompaniments are independent and varied in texture and style, as a whole the piano serves a more rhythmical function in these settings through more vertical writing and repeated rhythmic figures. The less exuberant poetry ("I gained it so." "I could not prove") combines some of the above-mentioned elements with longer, more lyrical phrases for the voice and less alteration of the poetry.[26]

However, Laitman explains that these "unique" elements were not a "conscious decision"[27] "If there is a difference between my Dickinson songs and my settings of other poets, it is just because I interpret each voice differently, but again, these differences are intuitive."[28]

Dickinson's poetry is readily available because it is now in the public domain.[29] Also, Her vast output of poetry provides many poetic choices for composers. When deciding which Dickinson poems to set, Laitman searches for poems that she seems to understand and composes music so she "might 'translate' them into music."[30] Her process of selecting poetry for her Dickinson cycles always begins with the first poem. She then searches for poems that "would allow good dramatic

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[26] Carol Lines, "The Songs of Lori Laitman," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 1 (September/October 2007): 35.

[27] Laitman, interview by author.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Laitman, Interview by author.

[30] Ibid.

flow and contrast" for the entire cycle.[31] Her focus is less on poetic themes, and more on the dramatic arc for the entire cycle. [32]

Reviews of Laitman's recordings "Dreaming" and "Within These Spaces" by Gregory Berg in the *Journal of Singing* have brought attention to many of Laitman's songs. Specific to this document, the recordings feature the song cycles *Four Dickinson Songs, Between the Bliss and Me*, and *One Bee and Revery*, which will be discussed in future chapters. Rather than providing an analysis of individual songs, Berg's reviews discuss the Laitman's general style. When describing *Within These Spaces* he says:

> Laitman has her own distinctive voice as a composer, but what makes it such a seductive voice is its limitless range of inflections, which stems from the even more limitless possibilities to be found in the world of works and ideas to which she is so devoted. A basic sort of excellence which one always finds in Laitman's songs is an unerring ability to write songs that can be sung (a simple-sounding proposition, but one that defeats many modern art song composers) and to set texts in such a way that they can be understood by listeners.[33]

In fact, Laitman's main concern when writing for the voice is to always "create dramatic music for them [words]."[34] Her intention is to "set the words beautifully for the singer, so that meanings can be conveyed to the audience."[35] The simplicity

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Berg, "Within These Spaces," 370.

[34] Laitman, interview by author.

[35] Ibid.

that she achieves in her music is a constant servant to the text, allowing Dickinson's poetry to be clearly delivered and understood.

Currently, Dickinson song cycles by Laitman include *Days and Nights* (1995), for soprano, *Four Dickinson Songs* (1996), for soprano, *Between the Bliss and Me* (1997), for soprano, *Two Dickinson Songs* (2002), for soprano, *One Bee and Revery* (2003), for soprano, *Fresh Patterns* (2003), for two sopranos, *The Perfected Life* (2006), for all voice types, and *In this Short Life* (2010), for soprano. The song cycle *Fresh Patterns* also contains poetry by Annie Finch. *Days and Nights* is a combination of poetry by Robert Browning, Francis W. Bourdillon, Christina Rosetti, and Emily Dickinson. Laitman has also written *The Earth and I* (2001), an a cappella choral cycle using the Dickinson poems "The Sun Went Down," "The Sky is Low," "The Wind." In addition, David Bamberger, of the Cleveland Opera, created a fifty-minute one-act chamber opera by combining various Laitman songs. This opera, *Come to Me in Dreams* (2004), features Dickinson's "Wild Nights," originally intended for the cycle *Days and Nights.*

When contemplating Laitman's compositional style and Dickinson's poetic style, common characteristics emerge. One compositional tool previously mentioned is Laitman's use of unexpected harmonic shifts. Just as Laitman refuses to settle on a key center for a lengthy span of time, Dickinson also often refuses to settle on one image within a poem. Kimball says that one of Dickinson's distinguishing characteristics "is the play of sound; poetic images are often complex and change rapidly. The reader has to be quick to change direction of thought with the poet."[36]

[36] Kimball, "Setting Emily,"462.

Laitman and Dickinson also share the ability to create a comfortable atmosphere for a complex core. Kimball explains that "Dickinson's verses can be deceptively informal -almost casual- but her word meanings alter subtly in combination with other words, moving like a snowball rolling downhill…Several readings are required before her stanzas begin to give up their inner substance."[37] Although Laitman's songs are tonal and sometimes "casual," her harmonic treatment can be unpredictable. This irregularity sometimes requires revisiting musical passages in order to notice the many subtle ways that Laitman uses word painting and musical images to convey poetic significance.

[37] Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

EMILY DICKINSON

Emily Dickinson

Reclusive, exotic, eccentric, and creative are words that have been used to describe Emily Dickinson. Born in Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was an American poet known for her prolific output - she wrote almost 1,800 poems over the span of about twenty-five years. After Emily's death, her sister Lavinia discovered this massive collection. Carolyn Lindley Cooley says that this unearthing of Emily's poetry is "one of the major events in American literary history."[38]

After this discovery, Lavinia decided to seek publication of her sister's poetry. Because of Emily's large number of punctuation and spelling errors, Lavina knew that substantial editing would be required for publication. Family friend Mable Loomis Todd, along with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, edited Emily's work for a decade in order to prepare it for publication. There is controversy regarding the editing of her work. Helen McNeil, writes that "a number of revisions change(d) the poems' themes and a few poems were revised heavily enough to become new poems,"[39] However, Cooley states that if Todd and Higginson had not put forth their

[38] Carolyn Lindley Cooley, *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters: A Study of Imagery and Form* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co. , 2003), 135.

[39] Helen McNeil, *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Virago Pantheon Pioneers, 1986), 4.

efforts, "there is a distinct possibility that Dickinson's creative efforts might have been lost to the literary world forever."[40] Though many editions of her poems have been published since this discovery, scholars recognize Thomas Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* and *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* as being closest to Emily's original manuscripts. [41]

Major Themes

When categorizing Emily Dickinson's poetry, McNeil suggests that looking at a chronological order is not the best approach.[42] Her rationale is supported by the fact that Dickinson wrote in the same form consistently throughout her life and she was known for combining poems from different time periods to be read as a unit.[43] This document examines Dickinson's poetry as it relates to multiple themes found within the body of her work. Literary critics have identified numerous important themes found within Dickinson's poetry, all complex, and many reaching far beyond the scope of this document. In an attempt to limit the discussion, only those relevant to the song cycles being addressed emerge as important for deeper examination.

Theme one: Knowledge

> Ashes denote that Fire was--
> Revere the Grayest Pile

[40] Cooley, 136.

[41] Jane Donahue Eberwein, "Emily Dickinson," American National Biography Online, http://www.anb.org.proxy.libraries.uc.edu/articles/16/16-00453.html?a=1&n=Emily%20Dickinson&d=10&ss=0&q=1 (accessed December 3, 2012).

[42] McNeil, 5.

[43] Ibid.

For the Departed Creature's sake
That hovered there awhile—

Fire exists the first in light
And then consolidates
Only the Chemist can disclose
Into what Carbonates.[44]

--Emily Dickinson*, 1063*

Hailing from a family of educators, Emily was constantly encouraged to pursue education. Her grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was one of the founders of Amherst College. He believed strongly in formal education for women.[45] In Richard Sewell's biography *The Life of Emily Dickinson,* he quotes Samuel Dickinson saying:

> Daughters should be *well instructed,* in the useful sciences; comprising a *good* English education; including a thorough knowledge of our own language, geography history, mathematics and natural philosophy. The female mind, so sensitive, so susceptible of improvement, should not be neglected.[46]

Her grandfather, regarded as a pioneer for female education during the Victorian era, provided Emily the support she needed for her own educational efforts. Her father, Edward Dickinson, shared in his father's beliefs and made great efforts to educate his own children.[47] Letters to his children indicate that education was his

[44] Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961), 484.

[45] Richard Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 37.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 335.

primary concern, even over religion.[48] As a child, Emily attended school in Amherst across the street from her family's home. [49]When Emily was ten years old she and Lavinia attended Amherst Academy, which had just begun to accept female students. The Academy, along with Amherst College, offered Emily an education that spurned passion for knowledge.[50]

While at the Academy, Emily was inspired by scientist and theologian Edward Hitchcock.[51] Hitchcock was the professor of chemistry and natural history at Amherst College. He also taught courses in geology and mineralogy. In her letters and poems, Emily showed a great interest in science, and this can be attributed to Mr. Hitchcock's lectures.[52] In fact, Hitchcock's influence can be linked to many of her poetic themes. Hitchcock's interest in the incongruities between religion and science influenced Emily's quest for reason within religion.[53]

In Emily's poetry, McNeil explains that the verb "to know" appears more than any other active verb. [54] She also indicates that Emily equates feeling with "a kind of knowing."[55] Her poetry avoids extreme emotion, leaning towards rational

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 337.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Eberwein, "Emily Dickinson."

[52] Sewall, 348.

[53] McNeil, 10.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

commentary on life circumstances. She uses her intellect to provide thoughtful responses to these circumstances, such as death, love, and religion.[56] Emily also incorporates metaphors for life and religion into the fabric of her poetry. For example, when she writes "Only the Chemist can disclose into what Carbonates," Emily is using the chemist as a metaphor for God. Furthermore, she is not emotionally detached in her presentation of this poem, but rather uses her educated understanding of physics in explaining the complications of death and her spirituality.

Theme two: Spirituality

> We pray—to Heaven—
> We prate –- of Heaven—
> Relate—when Neighbors die—
> At what o'clock to Heaven—they fled—
> Who saw them—Wherefore fly?
>
> Is Heaven a Place—a Sky—a Tree?
> Location's narrow way is for Ourselves—
> Unto the Dead
> There's no Geography—
>
> But State—Endowal—Focus—
> Where—Omnipresence—fly?[57]
>
> --Emily Dickinson, 489

Emily grew up in New England where Puritan traditions were still a part of the thinking and culture. [58]Her way of life, simple yet dedicated to work, can be attributed to this Puritan influence. Puritans believed in having an ongoing inner

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[56] Ibid., 14.

[57] Johnson, 235.

[58] Sewall, 23.

dialogue. This was "a way of thinking, of attacking one's inner problems, that Emily Dickinson was born to," says Sewall. [59] Emily's nearly 1,800 poems are indication of her constant internal questioning. On the contrary, Puritans were known for their declarations of witchcraft and their belief in demonic powers. Although the extreme measures that Puritans took to protect the presence of the church did not happen in Emily's time, conservative ideas still permeated peoples' thinking. Sewall writes that in order to comprehend Emily Dickinson's poetry, one must understand the cultural legacy of the Puritan tradition. [60] Her poetry, full of theological questioning, "may be regarded as a sustained, if muted, rebellion against this very inheritance."[61] Christian revivals, causing many of Emily's friends to purge themselves of sin and confess before a vengeful God, were problematic for Emily. [62]She refused to worship an "angry God"[63] and instead adopted her own way of worship that focused on nature. Her critical view of Christianity was a "major reason, certainly, for her own alienation and withdrawal" [64] and it lead her to often ponder the spiritual. In her well-known poem, "I never saw a moor," Emily expresses her belief in the unknown:

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 19.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 24.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 20.

I never saw a Moor—

I never saw the Sea—
Yet know I how the Heather looks
And what a Billow be.

I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven—
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the Checks were given—[65]

--Emily Dickinson, 1052

In this poem, she explains her own certainty in the existence of an unseen afterlife to knowing what a wave is without having seen the sea. Emily uses reason, taking a decidedly different direction than the emotional scare tactics rooted in Puritan ancestry, to evaluate her spirituality. Even though Emily wrote about her faith and spent a short time at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, she ultimately adopted an unconventional way of worship that focused on nature.

Theme three: Nature

In the name of the Bee—
And of the Butterfly—
And of the Breeze—Amen![66]

--Emily Dickinson, *23*

As commonly mentioned in biographies, Emily Dickinson was a recluse. However, Sewall explains in his biography that her reclusive lifestyle was because of her tendency to become overly critical with her friends. “She asked a great deal of her friends, flooding them with letters (the words must have come quickly to her

[65] Johnson, 480.

[66] Johnson, 14.

than most) and scolding them when they failed to respond in kind."[67] After Emily's education, she began to withdraw from social situations, and start a life of solitude. Thus nature becomes a gateway to the outside world for Emily, causing her to ponder its importance in her poetry.

Influenced by Hitchcock's lectures, Emily spent time studying nature, and her knowledge of the natural world was well informed. In her poetry, she often uses images of nature to convey thought. For instance, in this poem, she uses the nouns "Bee," "Butterfly," and "Breeze" in place of "Father," "Son," and "Holy Ghost." Helen Vendler writes in her book *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries*, that this poem is "blasphemous."[68] She explains the use of these nouns to represent the Holy Trinity is because of Emily's "conviction of her intellectual and aesthetic authority that enables her to stand, however whimsically, against the church, and offer Nature as a better object of worship than the Trinity."[69] Patrick J. Keane writes in his article "Dickinson's Death-Haunted Earthly Paradise," that Emily equates nature with Heaven.[70]This transcendentalist view permeates Emily's poetry. According to the *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Transcendentalism "opposed the idea that man needs an intercessor for reaching the divine and was [were] critical of

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[67] Sewall, 375.

[68] Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 27.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Patrick J. Keane, "Dickinson's Death Haunted Earthly Paradise," in *Critical Insights: Emily Dickinson*, ed. J. Brooks Bouson (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, Inc., 2011) 272-291.

formalized religion."[71] Although this movement did not reach full maturity until the mid-nineteenth century, much of Emily's poetry reflects its philosophy. To Emily, nature is the one thing that remains pure and constant; she views the natural world as her sanctuary.

Theme four: Death

'Tis not that Dying hurts us so—
'Tis Living—hurts us more—
But Dying—is a different way—
A Kind behind the Door—

The Southern Custom—of the Bird—
That ere the Frosts are due—
Accepts a better Latitude—
We—are the Birds—that stay.

The Shiverers round Farmers' doors—
For whose reluctant Crumb—
We stipulate—till pitying Snows
Persuade our Feathers Home. [72]

--Emily Dickinson, *335*

This poem depicts Emily's view of death: those left behind endure more pain than those who have passed. Here she uses the migration of birds as an analogy for the process of dying. "The birds" that refuse to fly south and allow the "pitying

[71] "Transcendentalism," retrieved from *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*(200), http://www.credoreference.com.proxy.libraries.uc.edu/entry/cupliteng/transcendentalism (accessed December 3, 2012).

[72] Johnson, 158-59.

Snows" to slowly kill, or send "Feathers Home," creates a harsh atmosphere for the living.[73]

Throughout her life she was faced with the realities of death and what it meant to lose a loved one. She grieved the deaths of two of her friends, Leonard Humphrey and Sophia Holland and memorialized them in many letters and poems. Sewall says that "When the matter of death became more 'organized' in her mind (to use her own term again), it inspired some of her finest poems."[74]Perhaps her mother's death was the most significant of all.

Her mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, suffered from health issues most of Emily's life. After Mrs. Dickinson's stroke in 1875, Emily and her sister Lavinia took care of Mrs. Dickinson until her death in 1882.[75] This was just four short years before Emily's own death. Sewall says that "one of the influences that kept Emily at home and contributed to her secluded life was her mother's health."[76] Even though Emily faced her mother's declining health on a daily basis, the shock of her mother's death left her in a deep state of grief.

Theme five: Love

> Heart! We will forget him!
> You and I—tonight!
> You may forget the warmth he gave—
> I will forget the light!

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[73] Vendler, 528.

[74] Sewall, 342.

[75] Ibid., 80.

[76] Ibid., 81.

When you have done, pray tell me
That I may straight begin!
Haste! lest while you're lagging
I remember him![77]

--Emily Dickinson, *47*

Although Emily never married, it is evident in her vast number of love poems that she did experience love. Historians and Dickinson scholars have long debated the sexuality of Emily Dickinson. They have speculated over whom her various lovers were and when the relationships took place. There has even been speculation about her female friendships that probe whether they "represent typical nineteenth-century girlhood friendships or more intensely sexual relationships."[78] However, through Emily's letters and various documentations from her family, her relationship with Otis Phillip Lord is not a mystery.[79] Lord, eighteen years her senior, was a politician and a close friend of Emily's father. Although many of her letters written to Lord have been destroyed, fifteen letters remain as evidence of this passionate relationship.[80] Because of his political career and his marriage, in addition to Emily's solitary lifestyle, the two never married. Sewall indicates that their "Idolatry" would have led to the disablement of both of their careers.[81] Lord

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[77] Johnson, 26.

[78] Trustees of Amherst College, "Emily Dickinson's Love Life," The Emily Dickinson Museum. http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/love_life (accessed July 1, 2012).

[79] Sewall, 664.

[80] Ibid., 653.

[81] Ibid., 665.

died two years before Emily, ending this love affair. Sewall says this about her relationships:

> Her love for him [Lord] was tonic and his influence invigorating; but she kept them both on this side of the idolatry she feared. In a way, every one of the major relationships in her life, with all they cost her in anguish or ecstasy, was not only a stimulus, involving each time a new and very personal Muse, but also a threat to her life as a poet, an invasion of the privacy without which she could not function. She weathered every one and continued on as poet. She did the same with Lord.[82]

Whomever she shared a relationship, either friend or lover, they served as "Muses" for her poetry.

These themes of knowledge, spirituality, nature, death, and love make up a small portion of the complex subjects within Dickinson's poetry. However general these themes may be perceived, they enable interpreters of her poetry to understand overall meaning before deciphering the inner complexities of her poetry. Perhaps more so than any other American poet, the undeniable depth of Emily Dickinson's poetry will always attract both readers and musicians.

Musicality of Poetry

Emily Dickinson is among the most frequently set American poets in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Well-known and frequently performed settings of Dickinson include Aaron Copland's *Twelve Songs of Emily Dickinson,* Thomas Pasatieri's *Far From Love*, and John Duke's *Six Poems by Emily Dickinson.* More recent settings of Dickinson include André Previn's *Three Dickinson Songs*, Jake Heggie's *The Starry Night*, and Tom Cipullo's *A Visit with Emily.* Carol Kimball, a

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[82] Ibid., 666.

well-known authority on art song and style, explains that Dickinson's poetry is commonly used for art song not only because of its poetic content, but also because of its literary simplicity.[83] She says that Dickinson's poems contain a certain musicality and lend themselves to art song through the use of the "four-line hymn stanza for her poems."[84] In addition, her poems contain intricate and thought-provoking images within the parameters of easily understood text. This device is especially appealing to art song composers because it entails a wide range of interpretation, without running the risk of being misunderstood for sake of diction.

Carlton Lowenberg's book, *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson and Music*, is a compilation of musical settings of Emily Dickinson poetry. The number of settings in this compilation is evidence of Dickinson's inspiration to composers. Published in 1992, this book pre-dates Laitman's Dickinson settings. In the introduction, Lowenberg explains that there are conflicting views about whether or not music enhances or detracts from Emily Dickinson's poetry. He clarifies that some critics believe "the music gets in the way of the surprise that is essential to full appreciation; that the poems move too quickly from the saying to the concept; that the words are too tight for expanded melodies."[85] He then later justifies that music

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[83] Kimball, "Setting Emily,"

[84] Ibid.

[85] Carlton Lowenberg, *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson and Music.* (Berkeley, CA: Fallen Leaf Press, 1992), xxv.

brings importance and strength to the poetry. [86] Perhaps the most important element to Emily's poetry that lends itself well to musical settings is its form.

In most cases, Dickinson's poems follow the form of a-b-a-b. Helen McNeil says "this has for centuries been the traditional form of the ballad, the hymn and the children's rhyme."[87] Dickinson often called her poems "hymns."[88] Carolyn Lindley Cooley explains in her book *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters*, that the meter of Emily's poems are indicative of her advanced skill of providing profundity of meaning within the structure of a metered poem. [89]Though her form is very structured, her poetry is lithe enough to have many different musical interpretations. This flexibility enables musicians to compose songs within various structures including strophic, through composed, binary, and ternary song forms. This flexibility can be shown in Emily's Poem *Wild Nights.*

Wild Nights-- Wild Nights!
Were I with thee,
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile-- the Winds--
To a Heart in port--
Done with the Compass--
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden--
Ah! the Sea!
Might I but moor—Tonight--

---

[86] Ibid., xxv.

[87] McNeil, 2.

[88] Cooley, 80.

[89] Ibid., 83.

In Thee![90]

--Dickinson, *249*

The rhyme scheme of this poem is representative of Dickinson's poetry. In this poem, the second and fourth line rhyme in each stanza. However in the second stanza, Dickinson nearly rhymes the words "port" and "chart." This follows the hymn form of a-b-a-b as previously discussed. Multiple composers have set this particular poem using many different forms, including Ernst Bacon, Lee Hoiby, and Lori Laitman.

Through an investigation of the style of Lori Laitman's music and the themes found within Emily Dickinson's poetry, this document aims to provide an examination of the song cycles *Four Dickinson Songs*, *Between the Bliss and Me,* and *One Bee and Revery.* Because much research has been devoted to Laitman's Holocaust output, this document provides valuable information for a great portion of Laitman's compositional output: her Dickinson settings.

[90] Johnson, 114.

CHAPTER THREE

FOUR DICKINSON SONGS

Lori Laitman's *Four Dickinson Songs* were published in 1996 and featured on the CD *Dreaming*, released May 1, 2003, with soprano Jennifer Check and pianist Warren Jones. In her score, Laitman writes that she combined these poems to create "dramatic musical contrasts." [91] This song cycle is approximately nine minutes in duration and was originally written for soprano. The vocal range spans the range of B♭3 to A5, with the tessitura lying around B4. Poems "Will There Really Be a Morning?", "I'm Nobody," "She Died," and "If I…" comprise this cycle.

1.Will There Really Be A Morning?

The first song of the cycle, "Will There Really Be a Morning?" begins with questioning and contains "wistful" piano and vocal figures.[92]

> Will there really be a "Morning"?
> Is there such a thing a "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 little Pilgrim
> Where the place called "Morning" lies![93]

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[91] Lori Laitman, *Four Dickinson Songs* (Enchanted Knickers Music, BMI, 1996).

[92] Ibid.

[93] Johnson, 49-50.

--Dickinson, *101.*

This poem is in the hymn form of abab abab abcb. Because Dickinson places the words "Morning" and "Day" in quotations, these words indicate significance. For example, "Morning" could refer to the after-life, and "Day" could be a symbol for mortality. Because a "Day" has a beginning and an end, Dickinson is possibly contemplating, or rather challenging, the concept of one's life having a beginning and an end. This poem voices the Transcendentalist view: the human soul can transcend the limits of society, such as organized religion and politics. This theme of spirituality permeates Dickinson's works.

Laitman creates a pensive mood through her piano writing. The song begins with a strong downbeat at the beginning of each measure, setting up each philosophical question in the text. The chordal texture of the piano, which recurs throughout the song, contrasts with Laitman's ascending vocal melody in mm. 1-7. In these same measures, the vocal line ascends, matching the inflections of a spoken question (see fig. 1). Text painting is evident as the voice makes an octave leap for the word "tall" in m. 7. Shifting of definitive questioning with imaginative inquires coincides with Laitman's use of piano texture throughout the piece. For example, in m. 8 the piano changes from a vertical, chordal texture, and moves towards broken chords, creating a more linear, horizontal texture. This change compliments the text as it moves away from less monumental questioning, like "Will there really be a "Morning," and towards more imaginative questioning, such as "Has it feet like Water lilies?". In addition, the dynamic marking indicates an introspective mood as it changes from *mf* to *mp* (see fig. 2).

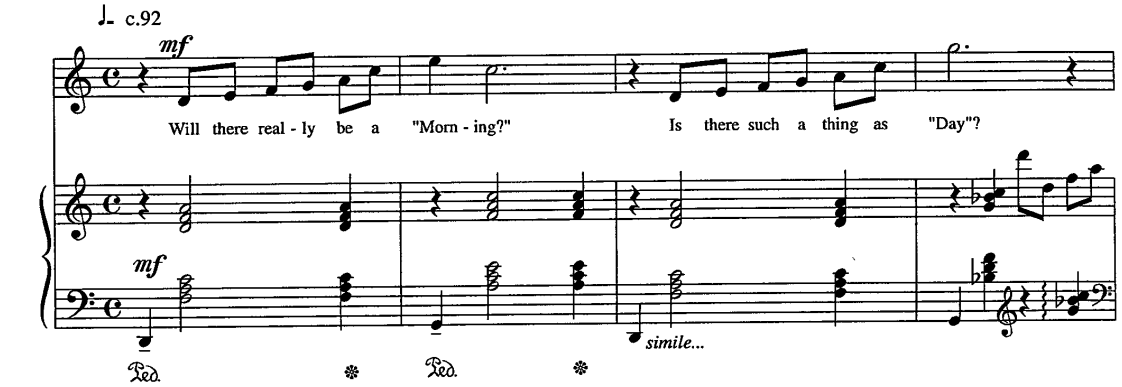


Figure 1, "Will there really be a Morning?" mm. 1-4.

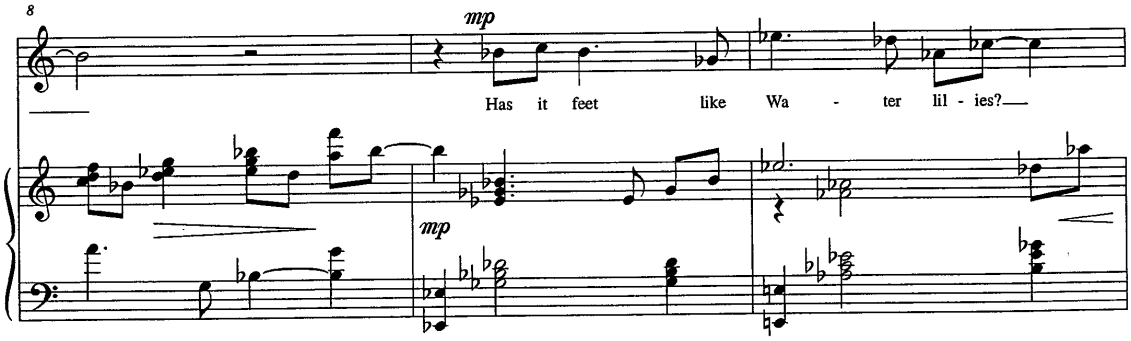


Figure 2, "Will there really be a Morning?" mm. 8-10.

Poetry and language are the building blocks of Laitman's compositional style. For instance, in mm.13-16, there is a shift in mood from grandeur on the words "famous countries" to a mood of mystique and marvel with "of which I have never heard?" Laitman achieves this shift through use of dissonance in m. 15 to illustrate the "foreignness" of the countries.[94] (see fig. 3). Another instance of word painting can be observed through the dichotomy of the words "skies" and "Pilgrim." In this instance, the "wise man from the skies" refers to God and "Pilgrim" refers to the common man. Laitman makes this distinction known through the range and length

[94] Laitman, interview by author.

of the vocal line. When indicating God, the vocal line's dynamic intensity increases through a leap of a fifth to the word "skies." The contrast happens as the vocal line descends to a lower range on the words "little Pilgrim." (see fig. 4). Laitman concludes this song with a repeat of Dickinson's first question: "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" However, this time the delivery is less profound and appears more contemplative. The song ends inconclusively, indicating that these deep philosophical questions may never be answered. (see fig. 5).

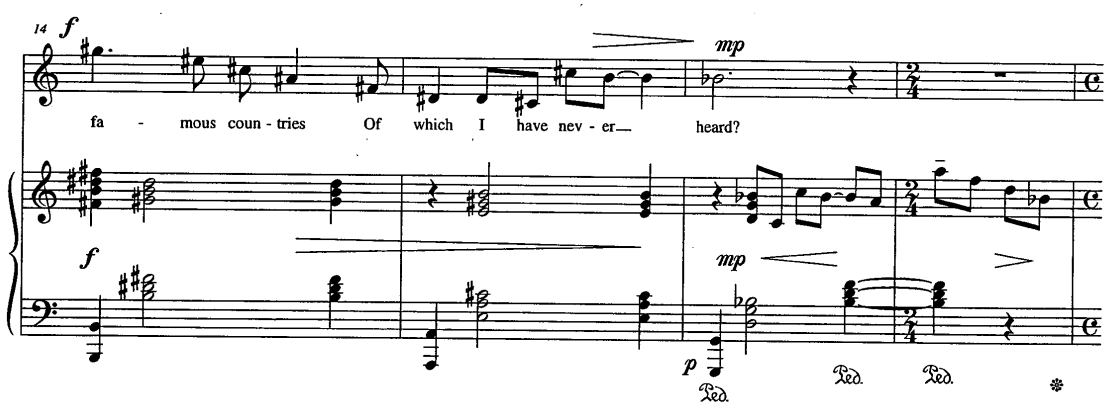


Figure 3, "Will there really be a Morning?" mm. 14-17.

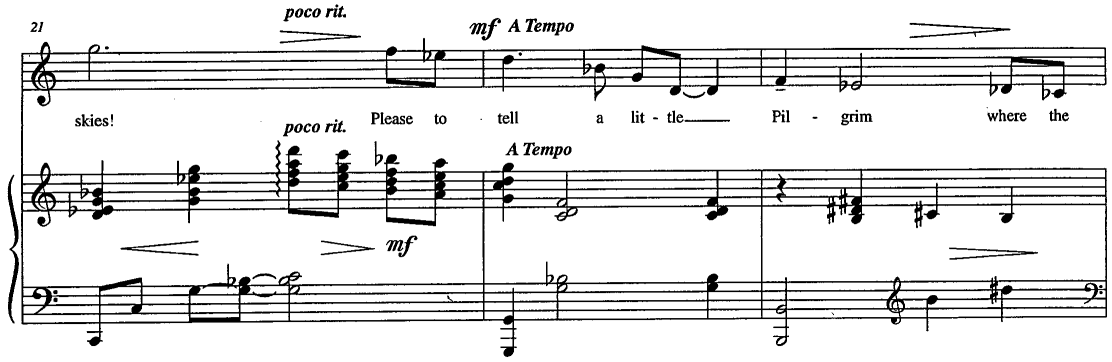


Figure 4, "Will there really be a Morning?" mm. 21-23.

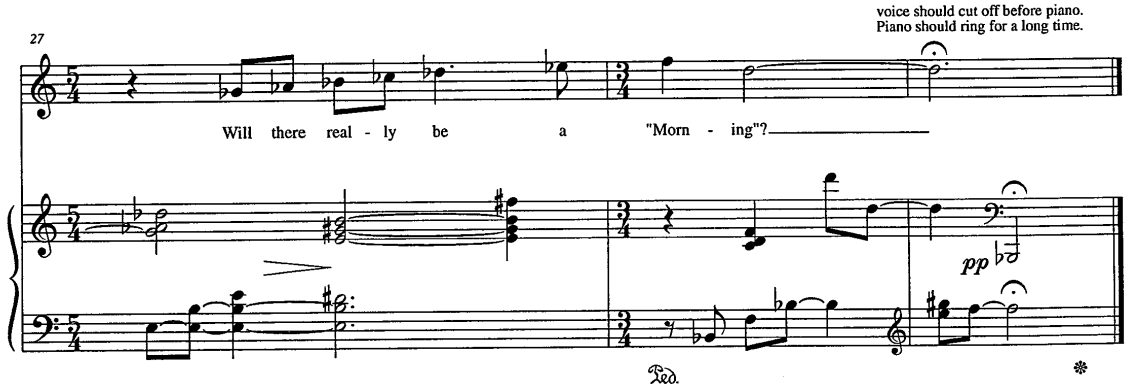


Figure 5, "Will there really be a Morning?" mm. 27-28.

2. I'm Nobody

"I'm Nobody" provides contrast in dramatic mood and musical treatment as the performer must move from the depth of spiritual questioning towards Dickinson's display of wit.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you—Nobody—Too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!

How dreary—to be—Somebody!
How public—like a Frog—
To tell one's name—the livelong June—

To an admiring Bog![95]

--Emily Dickinson, *288*

It is difficult to assign a direct theme for this poem. The desire for privacy is evident and Dickinson communicates this with humor. She mocks the behavior of a prideful person by comparing the prideful person to a Frog, which are known for their loud croaks during summer months, in this case June. This semblance gives an indication of Dickinson's annoyance with people that live for public acknowledgement. Although this poem does not fit neatly into one of the themes discussed in this document, through mockery, Dickinson provides insight to her preferred way of life: solitude.

Laitman establishes an immediate contrast to the lyrical "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" through a lively, buoyant opening in the piano part for "I'm Nobody." The piano sets the mood with an amusing introduction as beats 2 and 4 are emphasized in the right hand, while the left hand is accented on beats 1 and 3. (see fig. 6).

[95] Johnson, 133.

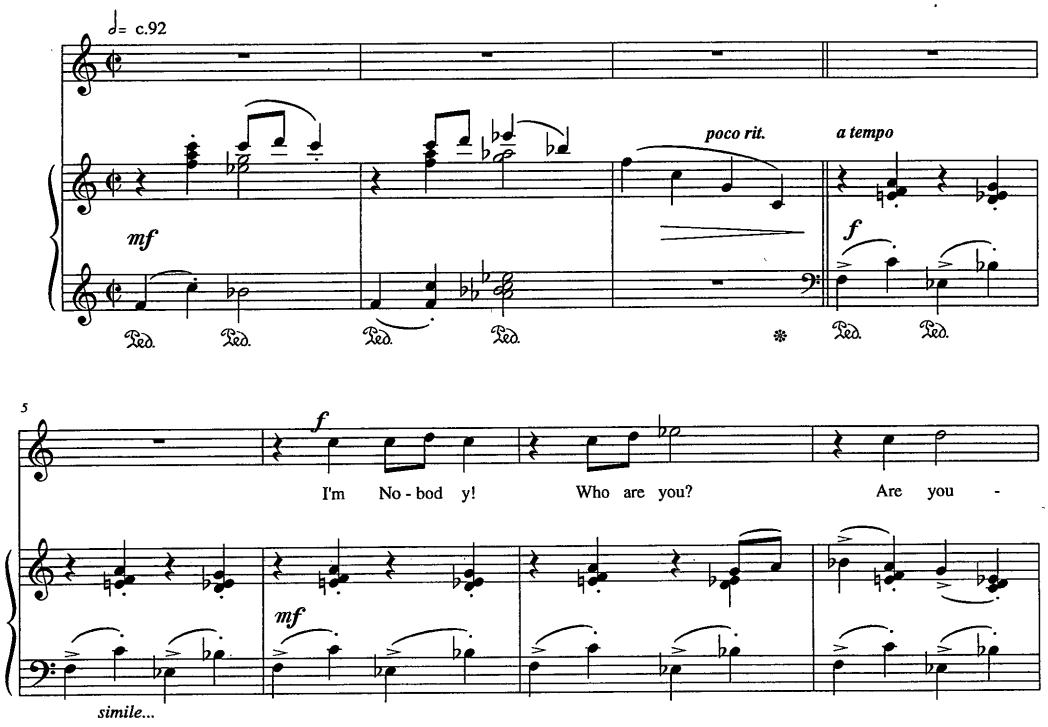


Figure 6, "I'm Nobody," mm. 1-8.

Laitman also adds to the wittiness of Dickinson's poem through repetition certain text and her playful treatment of the piano. She creates a "dreary" mood in the piano part in mm. 25 and 26. The performer should feel free to enhance this mood through emphasizing the word "dreary" in mm. 33-35. Laitman indicates vocal connection with her phrasing mark, but this is most likely for a comedic effect (see fig. 7).

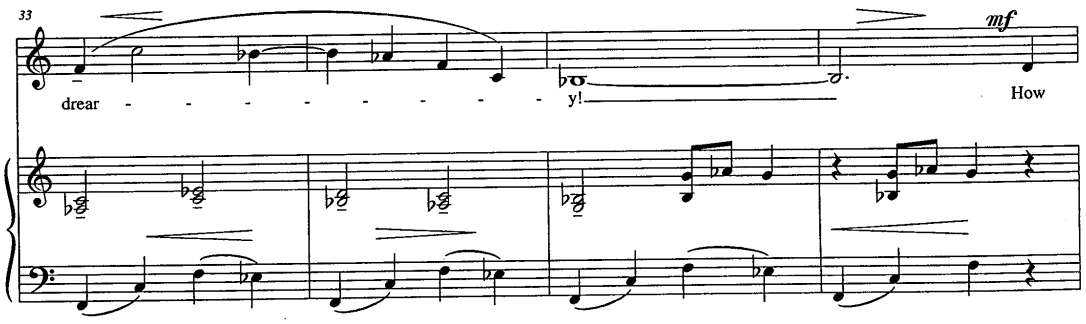


Figure 7, "I'm Nobody," mm. 33-36.

Often Laitman creates playful musical images to emphasis the text. For instance, the melody and the harmony in mm. 36-42 create an image of a frog hopping about. The vocal melody makes an upward leap on the word "Frog," while the piano "jumps about like a frog"[96](see fig. 8). Laitman repeats the text "an admiring" three times in mm. 54-61, using a descending melismatic sequence to add dramatic interest. Laitman explains that she "would like the singer to be 'diva-like,' so as to be worthy of the bog's admiration."[97] (see fig. 9). In m. 64, Laitman indicates "a slight 'limp' before beat 3" in the piano part. The piano sounds imbalanced as the singer, with a sense of paranoia, repeats the text "I'm Nobody! Who are You?" The last "Don't tell" can be sung in a partial whisper to add to the humor of this poem and performance. (see fig. 10).

[96] Laitman, interview by author.

[97] Ibid.

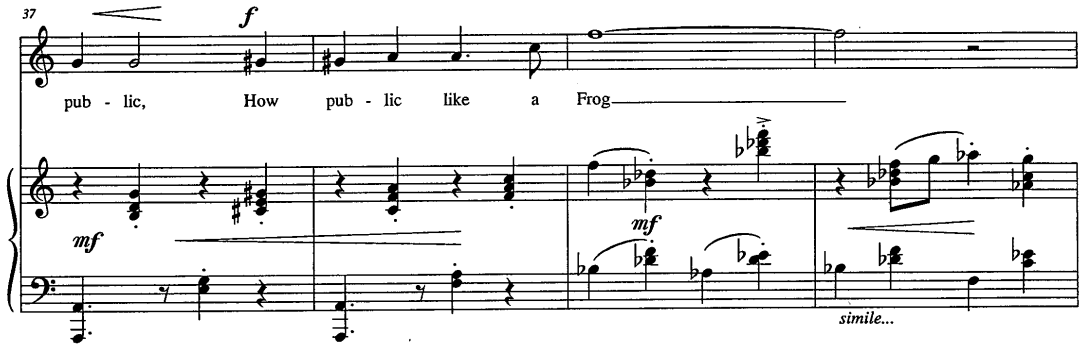


Figure 8, "I'm Nobody," mm. 37-40.

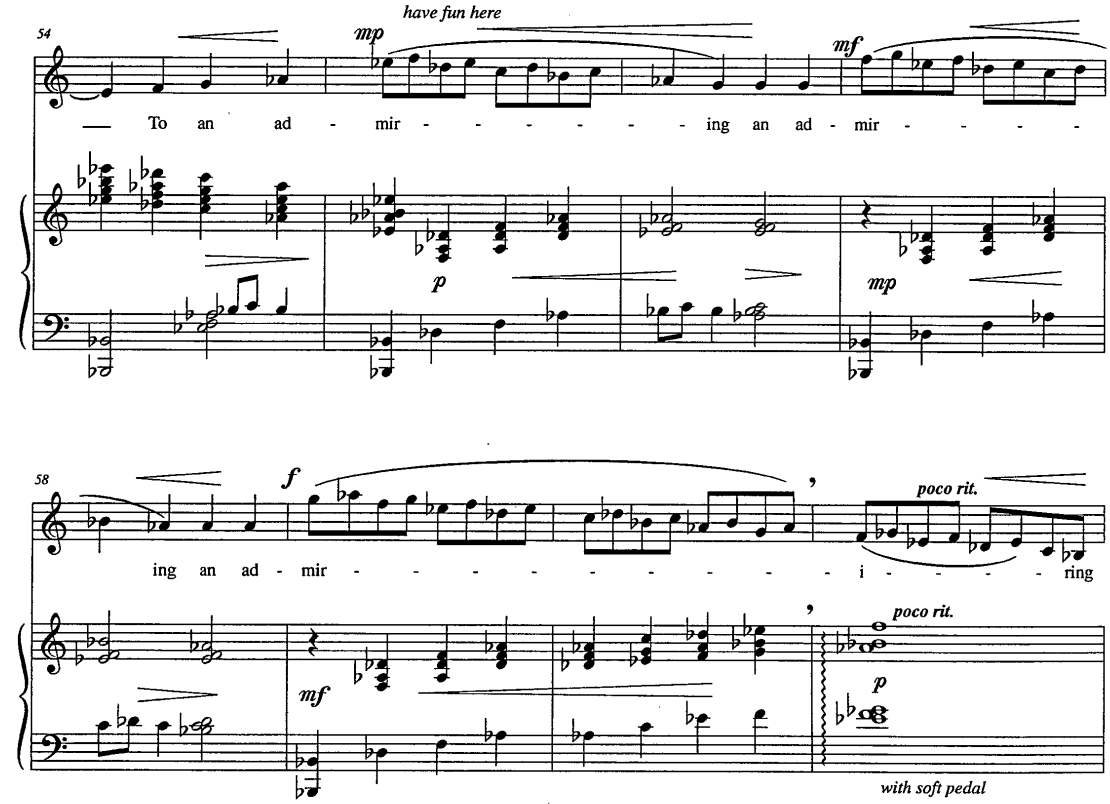


Figure 9, "I'm Nobody," mm. 54-61.

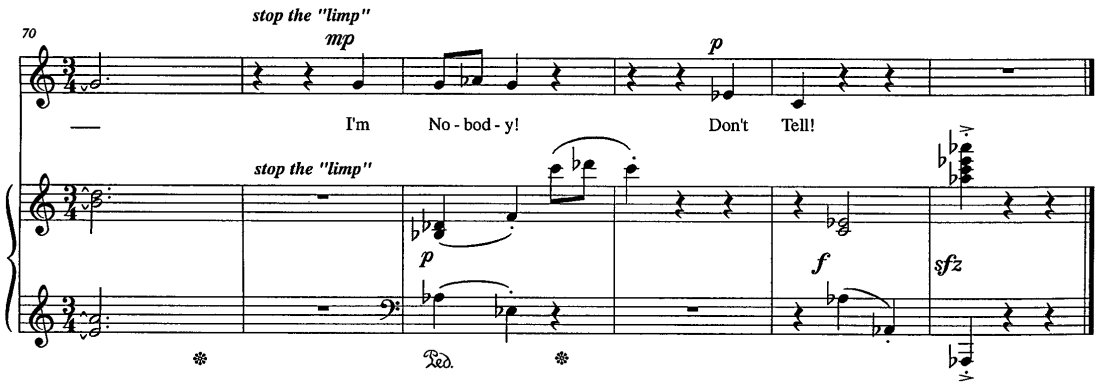


Figure 10, "I'm Nobody," mm. 70-75.

3. She Died

Perhaps the biggest contrast of this cycle is the abrupt change from the hysterical "I'm Nobody," to the dramatic setting of "She Died." This sharp contrast in mood is challenging for the performers who must move quickly from satire to nostalgia in a matter of seconds. In order to set up this transition, without bringing too much attention to the disparity, it is best for the performer to take a pause before moving directly into this song.

> She died—*this* was the way she died.
> And when her breath was done
> Took up her simple wardrobe
> And started for the sun.
> Her little figure at the gate
> The Angels must have spied,
> Since I could never find her
> Upon the mortal side. [98]

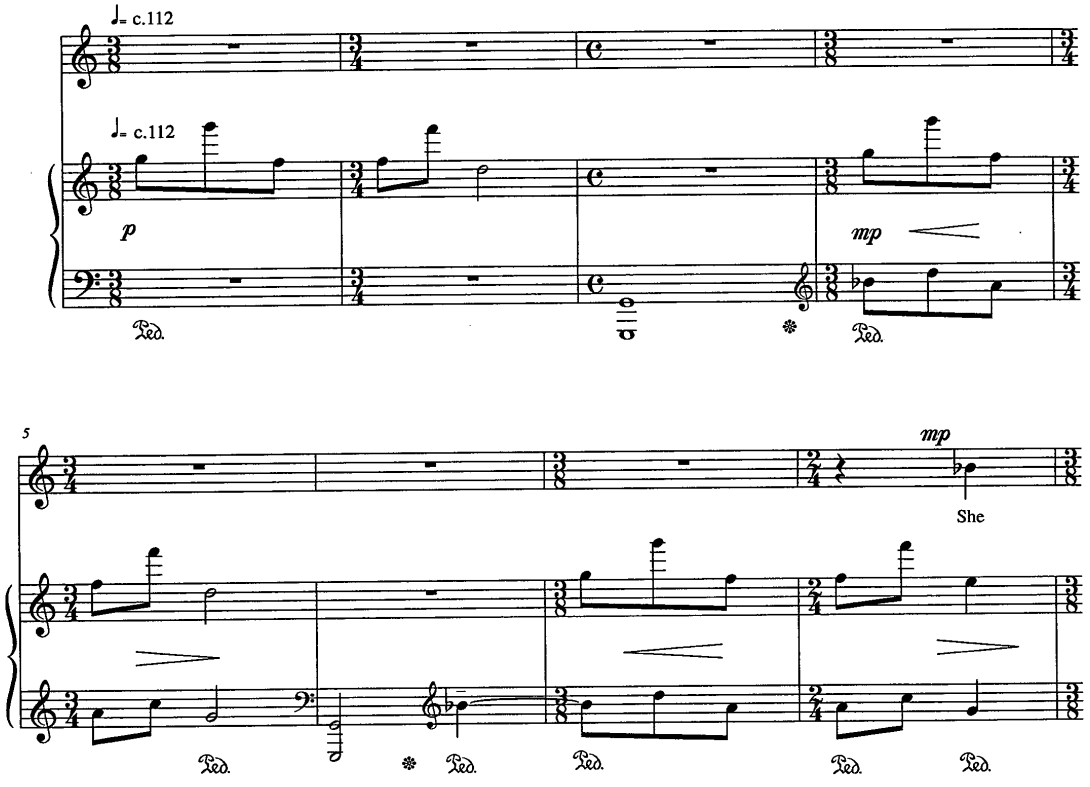
Dickinson, *150*

This Dickinson poem most identifies with the theme of death. Dickinson refers to "her little figure" and "simple wardrobe," but does not indicate the age of

[98] Johnson, 71.

the departed. Dickinson refers to the "mortal side" yet gives descriptions of the afterlife. This creates a feeling of limbo, as if the speaker and the deceased are between the earth and the "sun."

Just as Dickinson blurs the lines between the living and the deceased, Laitman also blurs the rhythmic pulse. This rhythmic freedom contributes to the ethereal mood of the poem and the music. Laitman achieves this by alternating 3/8, 3/4, common time, and 2/4 time signatures. (See fig. 11). She explains "the sparseness of the accompaniment immediately sets the stage for a more somber poem."[99] Furthermore, Laitman is very specific in her metronomic markings for this song, more so than any other piece in this cycle.



[99] Laitman, interview by author.

Figure 11, “She Died,” mm. 1-8.

With a sparse beginning and then gradual increase of texture and volume, Laitman’s piano writing gives the song momentum. The dramatic beginning suggests the profundity of death. Characteristic of Laitman’s unexpected musical changes, this momentum comes to a complete stop in m. 33, just as the description of the death begins in the text. Aurally, this creates a feeling of time standing still. As the description of the afterlife continues in m. 32, Laitman’s piano part is thin and does not provide stability for the voice. To add to this instability, the vocal line does not settle on a clear tonal center until m.66, when the voice and piano settle on a Bb major chord (see fig. 12). Overall, the rhythmic and tonal instability in this setting reflect the ambiguity and freedom of Dickinson’s poetry.

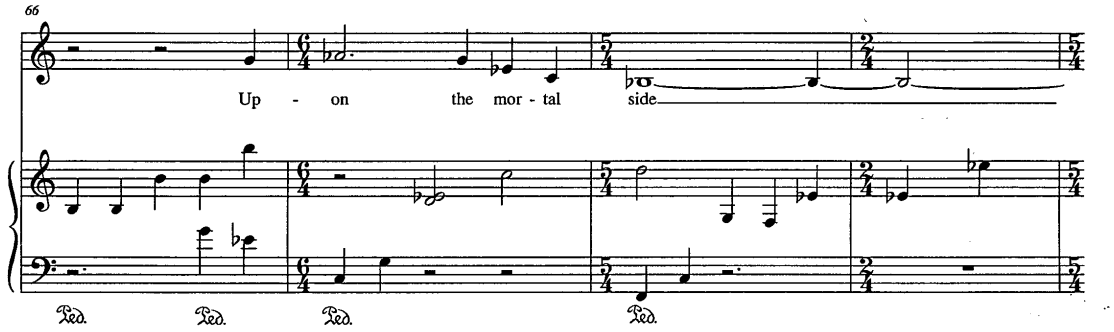


Figure 12, “She Died,” mm. 66-69.

Laitman’s use of word painting is also evident in this setting. She explains that the melody in m.38 and 40-41 on the text “started for the sun,” ascends as if someone is moving into the sky (see fig. 13). In addition, she contrasts this ascending scale by writing the voice part to descend to a low Bb, as if moving

towards the earth, on the text "mortal side" (see fig. 12). [100] Lastly, she ends this song with the piano "rising up to the 'heavens'" in mm. 76-77 (see fig. 14).

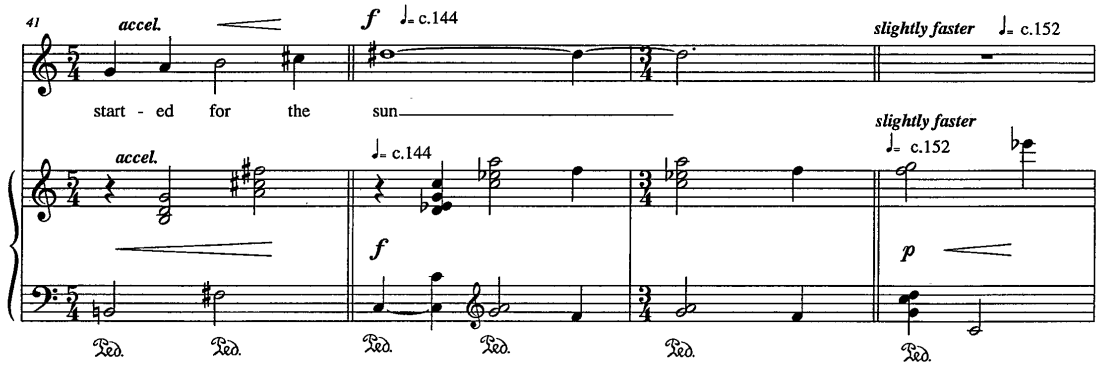


Figure 13, "She Died," mm. 41-44.

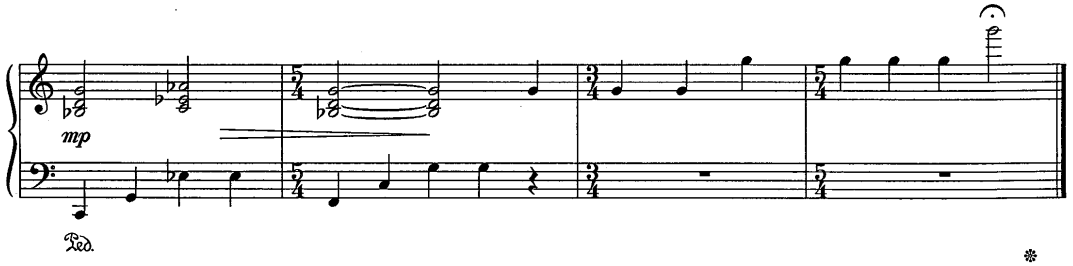


Figure 14, "She Died," mm. 74-77.

4. If I…

Finally, Laitman ends her *Four Dickinson Songs* with another huge contrast. Just as "She Died" creates instability and complexity with the subject of death, Laitman returns to simplicity with her setting of "If I…"

> If I can stop one Heart from breaking
> I shall not live in vain
> If I can ease one Life the Aching
> Or cool one Pain
>
> Or help one fainting Robin
> Unto his Nest again
> I shall not live in Vain.[101]

[100] Laitman, interview by author.

--Emily Dickinson, *919*

This Dickinson poem, though simple in content, most closely represents the love theme found in much of her poetry. Although the rhyme scheme is abababb, breaking away from Dickinson's typical hymn forms, it still maintains the ease needed for her uncomplicated and moving text. The text communicates that even the smallest gesture of kindness can give meaning to life.

After listening to this seemingly straightforward setting of Dickinson's poem, one might assume that Laitman's setting is a simple as Dickinson's text. However, Laitman alternates between 3/4, 2/4, and 3/8 time signature (see fig. 15). Because Laitman repeats Dickinson's poem twice, acknowledging where certain rhythmic and melodic differences occur is paramount. For example, the first time the singer sings "Unto his Nest again" in mm. 12 and 13, *again* descends from a D to a Bb. The second time "again" starts on a Bb and moves down to a G. The same subtle changes in melody can be observed at the end of both "verses" with the words "I shall not Live Live in Vain."

[101] Johnson, 433.

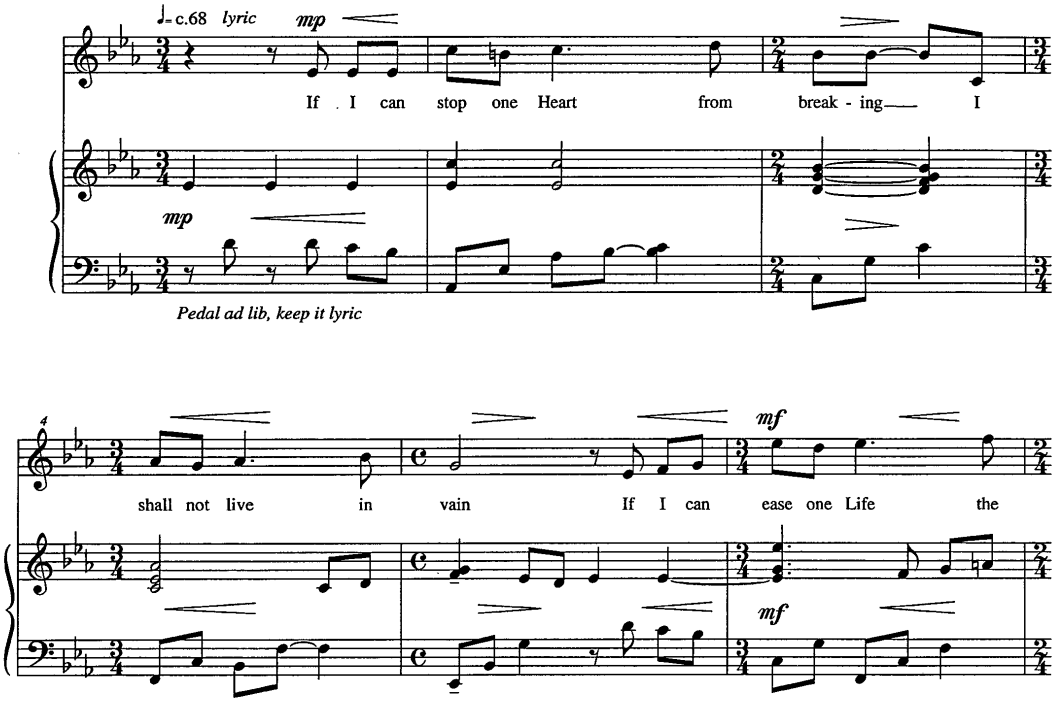


Figure 15, "If I...," mm. 1-6

In mm. 7-8, Laitman writes a harmonic change from g minor to Ab major. Laitman explains that this harmonic shift is another way of reacting to the text. She says that this harmonic shift "perfectly captures the meanings of the [words] "aching" and "cool" (see fig. 16). In addition, she uses word painting through the use of a descending melisma on the word "fainting."

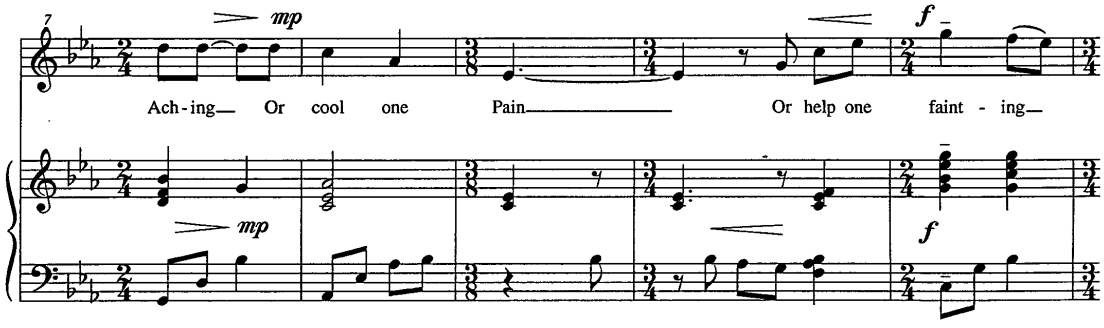


Figure 16, "If I...," mm. 7-11.

CHAPTER FOUR

BETWEEN THE BLISS AND ME

Lori Laitman's *Between the Bliss and Me* was commissioned by Dr. Adelaide Whitaker and was published in 1997. Like *Four Dickinson Songs*, it is also featured on the CD *Dreaming* released in 2003, featuring the performers Check and Warren. This cycle is approximately five minutes in duration and was originally written for soprano. The vocal range spans from B3 to B5. The tessitura is different for each song in this cycle, but primarily centers B4. Poems "I Gained it So," "A Book," and "I Could Not Prove" comprise this cycle.

1. I Gained it So

In the first song of the cycle, "I Gained it So," Laitman indicates that the pianist should "ad lib" the pedal unless it is marked in the score, causing the music to remain "flowing."[102] Dickinson's poem is a commentary on how one can obtain "bliss."

I gained it so—
By Climbing slow—
By Catching at the Twigs that grow
Between the Bliss—and me—
It hung so high
As well the Sky
Attempt by Strategy—

I said I gained it—
This—was all—
Look, how I clutch it
Lest it fall—
And I a Pauper go—
Unfitted by an instant's Grace
For the Contented—Beggar's face

[102] Lori Laitman, *Between the Bliss and Me* (Enchanted Knickers Music, BMI).

I wore—an hour ago—[103]

Emily Dickinson*, 359*

There are some irregularities of form within the rhyme scheme of this poem. The aaabccb, abab, abba form contrasts with Dickinson's usual hymn form of abab. The poem explains the difficult and slow process of obtaining "bliss." There are many interpretations of bliss: spiritual joy, contentment, Heaven, etc. This poem observes working towards this state of bliss is the *slow* work of a "beggar," causing one to be "unfitted by an instant's Grace." Because the process is difficult, holding on to this kind of rapture, or "clutching" to it, gives value to its ownership. If assuming that "bliss" refers to Heaven, the "between the bliss and me" could be life, and all of the challenges of daily living. Using this interpretation, this poem is most closely associated with the theme of spirituality.

Laitman opens her cycle with a setting of this poetry that follows the irregularity of Dickinson's poetic form. For the listener, the overall effect is pleasing and tonal as Laitman does not overly complicate the text. She does however include frequent harmonic shifts that are always motivated by the poetry and her piano writing has an improvisational character. As for many of her songs, she does not include a key signature. This allocates the movement through many tonal centers. For example, in mm. 1-5, Laitman establishes a tonal center of EM through her use of accidentals. The shifts occur on the text "Between the Bliss and me," where the melody and harmony suggest movement away from EM and towards GM in m. 6 and DM in m. 7 (see fig. 17).

[103] Johnson, 170.

The song can be broken into three distinct sections as indicated by the poetry. The first section, mm. 1-16, contains a disjunct vocal line on the words "Catching at the Twigs." By contrast, the word "grow" is sustained crafting an example of Laitman's use of word painting. In this section, Laitman creates an image of a treacherous climb as she causes the phrases to sound as if they are speeding up, then slowing down through the use eighth notes followed by a dotted quarter note at the end of each phrase. The vocal line literally "grows" in range, moving from the D# 4 on the word "so," back down to the F#3 on the word "slow," then back up to an E5 on the word "grow." Because the vocal line moves down on the word "slow," she is able to musically represent the difficulties, or setbacks, in life's journey (see fig. 17). She continues the second phrase of this section with the same disjunct writing of the melodic line within the voice. The text painting continues as the words "high" and Sky" are set higher pitches (see fig. 18).

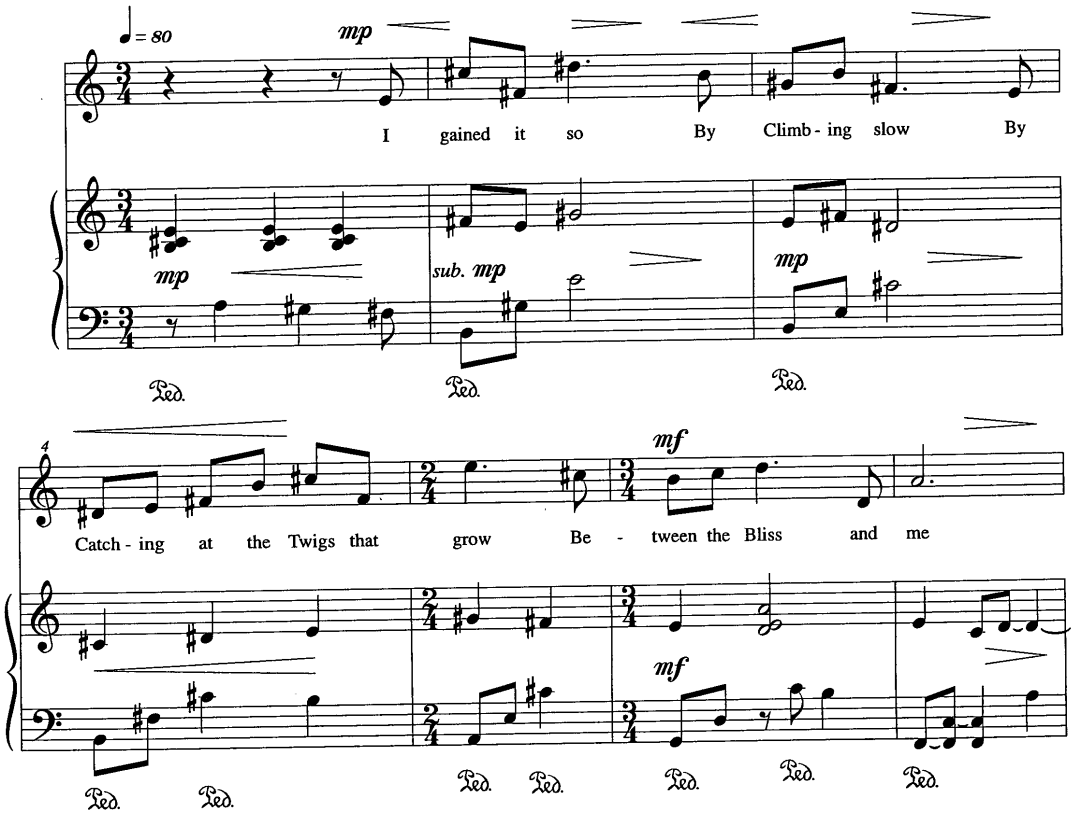


Figure 17, "I gained it so," mm. 1-7

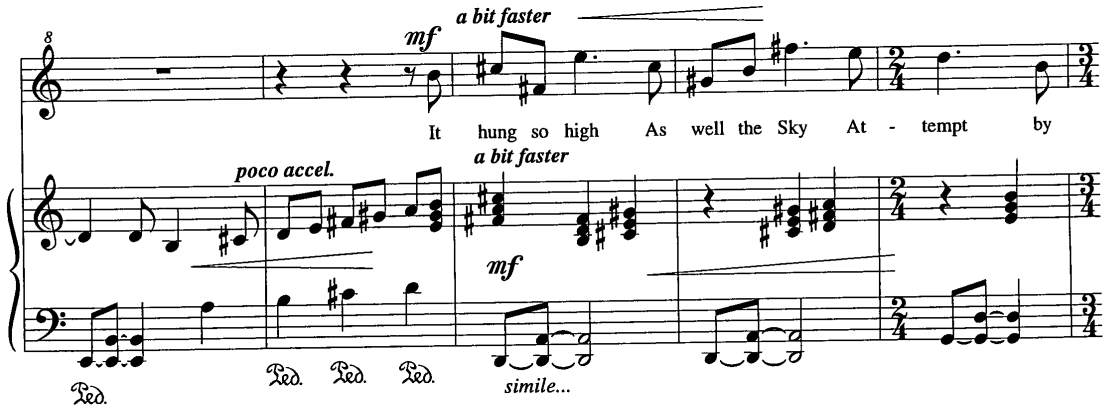


Figure 18, "I gained it so," mm. 8-12

The next section is mm. 17-24, contains two identical melodic phrases. Laitman's piano and vocal texture is definitive as the poem designates "Bliss" is "gained" and one must "clutch it" or hold on to it so it does not "fall." In this section,

the accompaniment contains chords that move directly with the voice, suggesting a musical representation of achievement, or having arrived. Unexpected melodic treatments occur on the words "all" and "fall." Both times Laitman chooses to have the singer descend to a G#4, which is the 3rd of the E chord, instead of moving to the tonic. In this instance, the voice literally "falls" at the end of each phrase (see fig. 19).

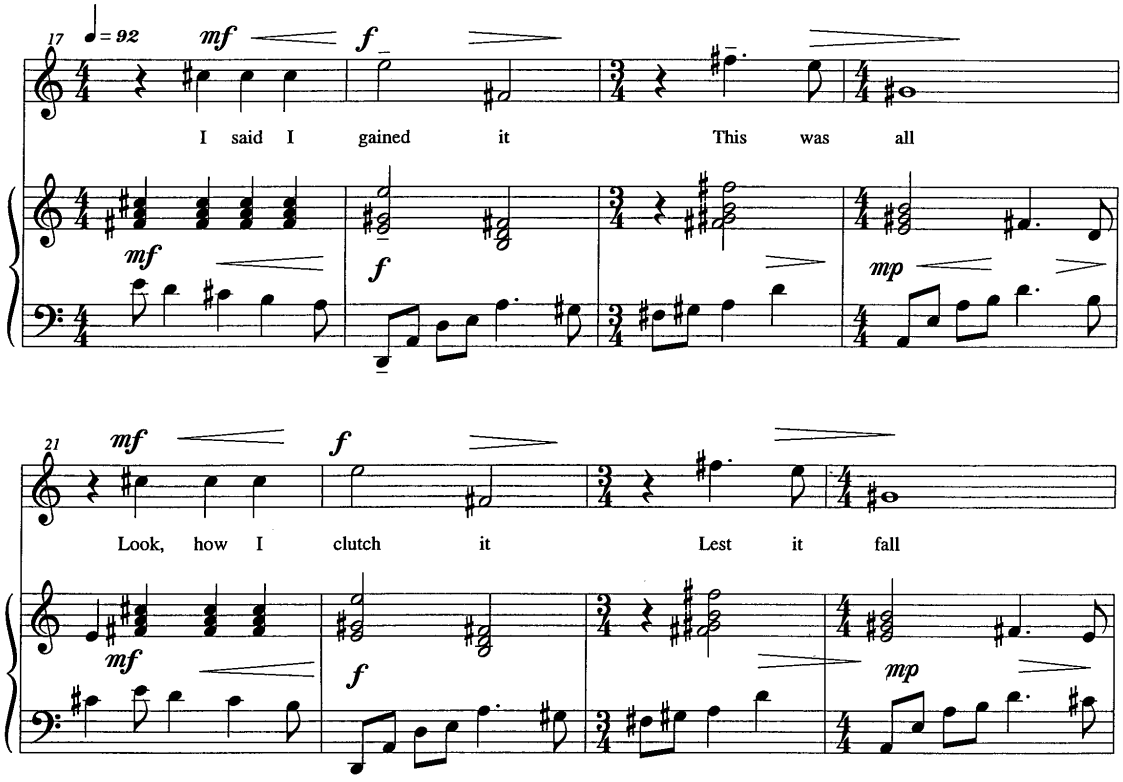


Figure 19, "I gained it so," mm. 17-24

The last section, mm. 25-38, begins with the chordal treatment as heard in the second section, however the vocal line returns to the disjunct figure located in the first section. Because of the improvisatory quality of Laitman's writing, it is hard to indicate an overall tonal center. Laitman explains that the improvisational sound is unintentional, clarifying she wants "to honor the words and create dramatic music

for them."[104] Consequently, using the poetic notion that achieving bliss is the slow work of a pauper, Laitman's vocal line seems unresolved, just as the pauper leaves "unfitted by an instant's Grace." She does, however, resolve the song in the piano with an FM chord. (see fig. 20)

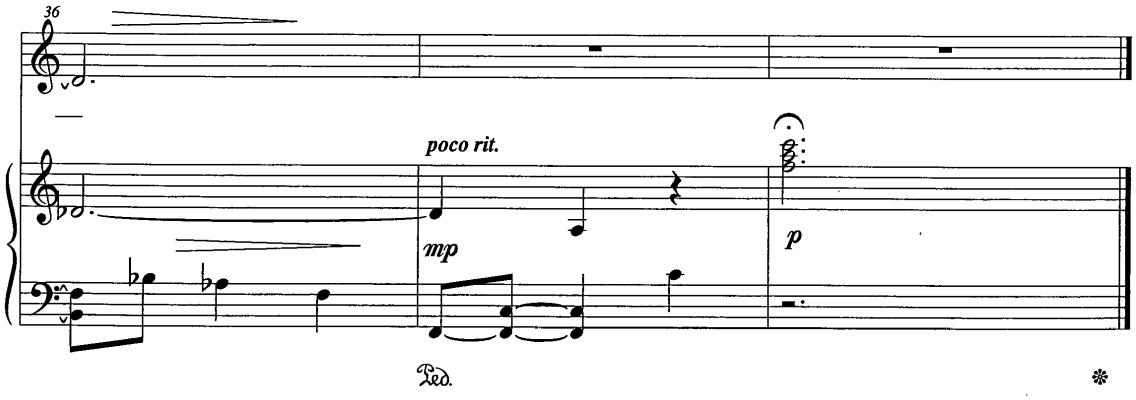


Figure 20, "I gained it so," mm. 36-38

Much like Laitman's *Four Dickinson Songs*, Laitman choose the next poem as a foil to "I gained it so." Her setting of "A Book," though not necessarily a humorous poem, is riddled with wit and whimsy.

2. A Book

He ate and drank the precious Words—
His Spirit grew robust—
He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was Dust

He danced along the dingy Days
And this Bequest of Wings
Was but a Book— What Liberty
A loosened spirit brings—[105]

Emily Dickinson*, 1587*

[104] Laitman, interview by author.

[105] Johnson, 658.

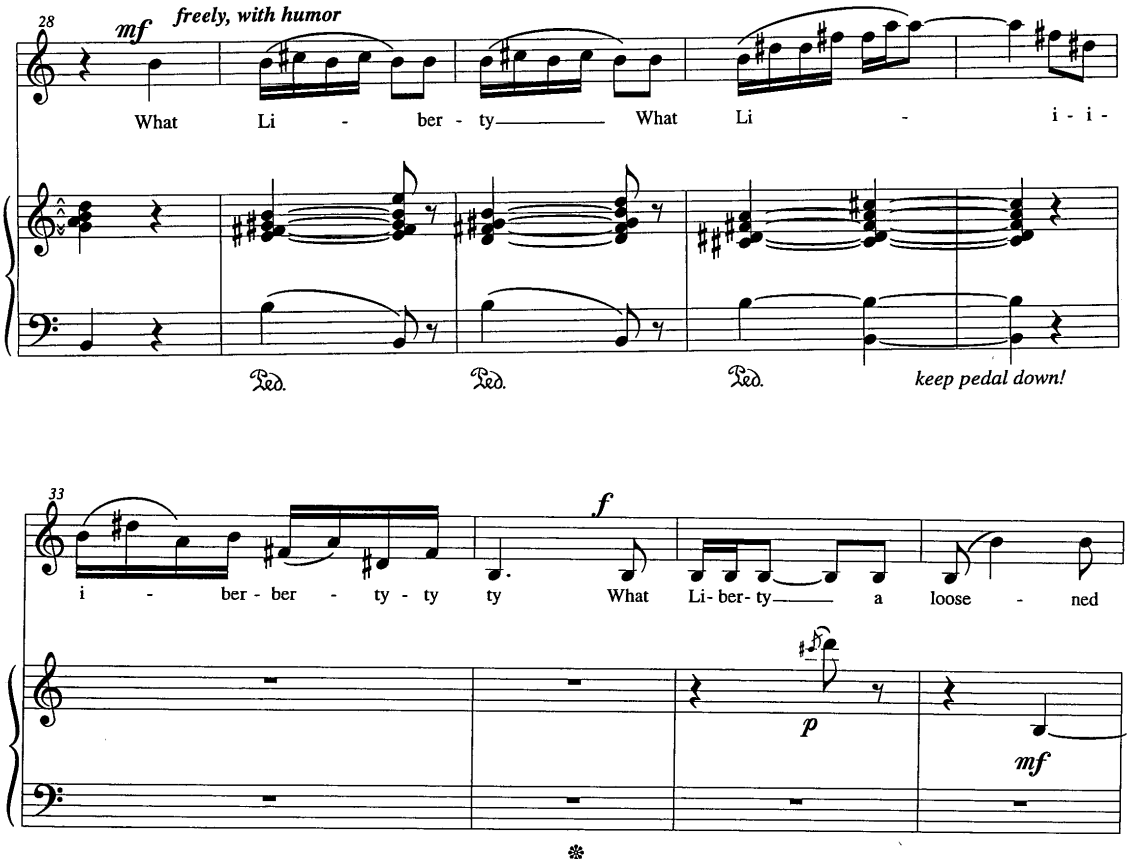
This poem, hymn form, is about a person that lives his life according to "a Book." Characteristic of her writing style, Dickinson uses capital letters to give words, particularly nouns, symbolic meaning. The book in the poem could represent the Holy Bible or an inspirational piece of literature. Considering Dickinson's transcendentalist views, she was often inspired by poetry and other works of art, not religion. In the second strophe, Dickinson explains that all that was left was his "Book." Knowing that Dickinson objected to the strict rules of organized religion, "What Liberty A loosened spirit brings" could mean that living according other forms of inspiration other than the Bible is liberating and can loosen one's spirit. The poem's main theme focuses around man's own quest for spirituality, rather than religion.

Although Dickinson's poem is not overtly humorous, she does use words such as "drank," "danced," and "loosened" within her poem, that could suggest inebriation, or at least becoming drunk with "the precious words." Likewise, Laitman's setting undoubtedly assumes a playful mood. When asking Laitman about her interpretation, she says "My decision was intuitive. Certainly the poem is about the freedom of imagination—so I just let my imagination run free."[106]Laitman uses a quick tempo of ♩=152, providing a contrast to the end of "I gained it so" which can be humorous for the performer to switch abruptly to this new mood. The vocal part is rhythmically flexible and supported by the buoyant texture of the piano. This whimsical treatment of the piano and the voice continues until m. 28. Laitman gives directions for

[106] Laitman, e-mail message to author, January 15, 2013.

the singer to perform "freely, with humor." The melismatic melody coupled with the chordal accompaniment for the text "what Liberty," urges performers to sing "Liberty" with rhythmic freedom (see fig. 21). The singer must have the ability to display three octaves in mm. 36-37, making the phrase on the text "a loosened spirit" technically challenging. She says:

> For me, the song takes "flight" with its quick tempo and its clear harmonies, meant to color the meanings behind the words. The humorous section arrives near at the end, with the "Liberty" section. The addition of the extra "ber" and "ty" syllables was a way to expound on the meaning of the word…. that with imagination, anything is possible. So I took my own liberties—and the extreme vocal range also adds to this word painting. I just conceived of the last line as sort of a "punch" line and set it as such.[107]



[107] Laitman, interview by author.

Figure 21, "A Book," mm. 28-36

The last song of the cycle "I could not prove" is reflective and explains the growth that one encounters through life's journey. A commission by Adalide Whitaker, Laitman has also indicated that this song is written for her mother's seventy-ninth birthday.

3. I could not prove

I could not prove the Years had feet—
Yet confident they run
Am I, from symptoms that are past
And Series that are done—

I find my feet have further Goals—
I smile upon the Aims
That felt so ample—Yesterday—
Today's—have vaster claims—

I do not doubt the self I was
Was competent to me—
But something awkward in the fit—
Proves that—outgrown—I see—[108]

Emily Dickinson, *563*

The poem describes how time can change a person's perception of his or her own life; how one's personal goals and purpose can change very quickly. Dickinson assigns the image of "Years" having "feet" to communicate the way fast years pass. She is not being critical of her younger self because she says that her "Aims" of "Yesterday" were "ample." However, Dickinson explains that she has "outgrown" the "awkward" fit of "Yesterday," and feels that "Today's" "Goals" "have vaster claims." Dickinson expresses that her knowledge, gained only through living life, is how she

[108] Johnson, 274.

can assess her present life. This poem's conclusion is most closely linked to Dickinson's knowledge theme.

Dickinson's poetic hymn form compliments Laitman's strophic setting. Laitman explores the boundaries of this form by modifying each strophe through key changes and unexpected melodic changes. For example, verse one is written in the key of A major and moves to the key of Bb major for the second verse in mm. 10-11 (see fig. 22). One would expect another key change of a half step for the third verse, however Laitman moves down to the key of G. Laitman explains her choice in the following quote:

> Honestly, it was just the way I heard everything. I don't plan my songs out in advance, I find my way, getting all my clues and inspiration from the poetry as well as my own intuition. That key (G) was the key that sounded right to my ear. Interestingly, when we were recording this, we tried it up a half step, because it might have suited Jennifer's voice better—however, both Warren and I strongly felt that the new harmonic colors, even though all the relationships remained relative, somehow did not seem right for the words. So we kept everything as it was. It's almost as if certain keys have certain meanings and colors for me.[109]

The use of key signatures is uncharacteristic of Laitman's writing, however she does use key signatures in the following example to transition from EM to B-flat M.

[109] Laitman, interview by author.

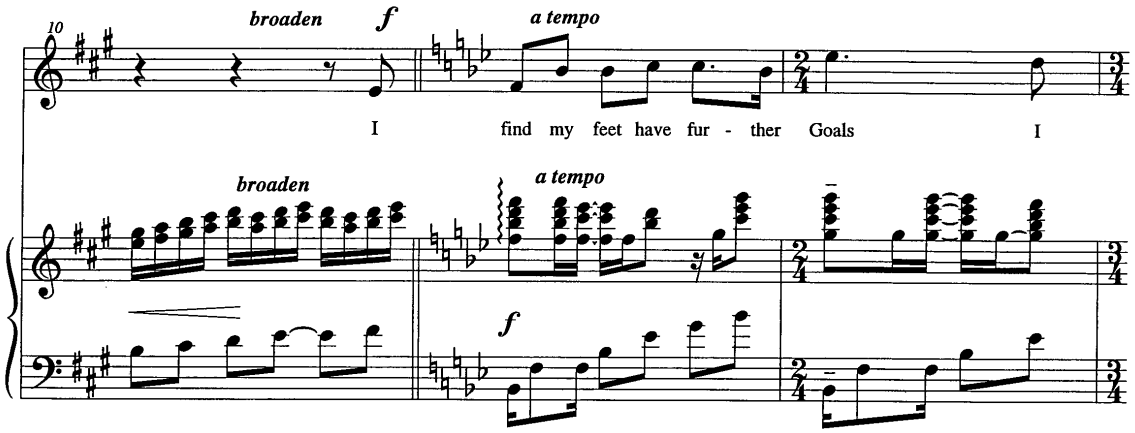


Figure 21, "I could not prove," mm. 10-12

Laitman uses text painting through the wide vocal leaps in the voice and repetition of text For instance, in m. 17, the voice makes a large leap up to a Bb 5 on the word "vaster." Another example of this treatment is in m. 23, on the word "awkward." Laitman uses a leap of a minor seventh, which can sound cumbersome within the context of this tonal setting. In addition, Laitman repeats the text "outgrown," each time at a higher pitch and at a longer duration, causing the word to grow for through repetition (see fig. 22).

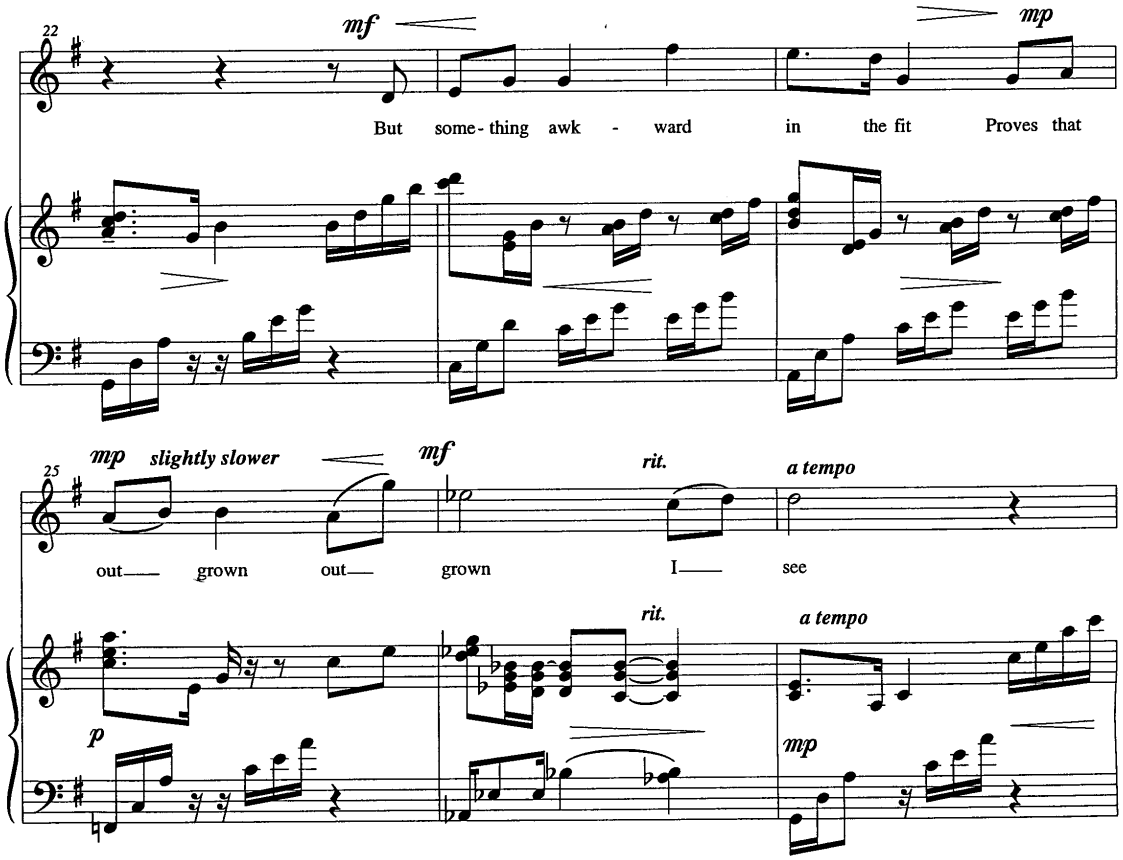


Figure 22, "I could not prove," mm. 22-27

Between the Bliss and Me is about the journey of life. It begins with the difficulties that one will encounter, moves to the joys of life, then finishes with the wisdom one receives. Laitman depicts this microcosm of life through her careful choice of text, and the settings in which she displays them.

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE BEE AND REVERY

Lori Laitman's *One Bee and Revery* was published in 2003. It received its premiere on June 19, 2004 at the Levine School of Music in Washington, DC with soprano Lisa Shaw and pianist Patrick O'Donnell. This cycle is featured on the CD *Within These Spaces*, released May 1, 2009, with soprano Jennifer Check and pianist Warren Jones. *One Bee and Revery* was written as an 85th birthday present for the composer's mother, Josephine Laitman. Laitman sums up this cycle by saying:

> I composed "One Bee and Revery" in the summer of 2003 as a present for my mother's 85th birthday. The flowing nature of the accompaniment in the first song portrays the flowing flight of a butterfly. In song 2, the uniqueness of Dickinson's thought that "hope is a strange invention" is underscored by quirky harmonies, and the constant rhythmic motion in both voice and piano suggest the "unremitting action." Lyricism returns in "To Make A Prairie." The main theme surfaces three times with dreamier harmonies under the middle repetition. Dickinson's witty ending is reflected by a change in mood.[110]

The song cycle, appoximately four minutes in duration, was originally written for the soprano voice. The voice part spans the range of D4 to A5. Of all three cycles discussed in this document, *One Bee and Revery* contains the lowest tessitura, lying closer to a G4. Poems "The Butterfly upon," "Hope is a strange invention," and "To Make a Prairie" comprise this cycle.

1. The Butterfly upon

The first song, "The Butterfly upon" opens with broken arpeggios in the piano that imitate the fluttering and rhythmic flight of a butterfly. The voice enters

[110] Lori Laitman, *One Bee and Revery* (Enchanted Knickers Music, BMI).

with its own counterpoint, creating an exposed yet colorful atmosphere for Dickinson's poem.

> The Butterfly upon the Sky,
> That doesn't know its Name
> And hasn't any tax to pay
> And hasn't any Home
> Is just as high as you and I,
> And higher, I believe,
> So soar away and never sigh
> And that's the way to grieve—[111]
>
> Emily Dickinson*, 1521*

Dickinson's poem slightly deviates from her typical hymn form in the first four lines, only to return to an abab form for the last four lines. The poem explains that though a butterfly "doesn't know its name," or have a "tax to pay" or a "Home," its importance in is equal to "you and I." Assuming that "the Butterfly" has a double meaning due to its capitalized usage, "the Butterfly" can mean the human soul. Just as a caterpillar turns into a butterfly through metamorphosis, humans undergo a transformation through the process of death. Dickinson's death theme is most obvious when she says "and that's the way to grieve." This line could mean that our souls are like butterflies, free to "soar away and never sigh," so we are never completely gone but forever connected to the world.

The accompaniment does little to support the melody in the vocal line, but rather creates an ethereal atmosphere for the text. Laitman designates staccato markings with stresses for the piano sequence that begins in m. 1, indicating equal importance of each note. The piano continues this sequence until m. 6, where the pattern is interrupted with an ascending scale in the left hand. In m. 7, Laitman

[111] Johnson, 637.

marks a slight *ritardando*. This particular spot can be difficult for the singer and pianist to coordinate, so planning ahead is advised (see fig. 23). Laitman's freedom with the tempo throughout this song, moving from sequencing to ascending and descending scales, can be reminiscent of the unpredictability of a butterfly's flight. She says "the flowing nature of the accompaniment in the first song portrays the flowing fight of a butterfly." The voice and the piano in mm. 14-20 begin transferring this "flowing nature" through a conjunct, scale-like, melodic line. For example the voice begins with the pick-up to m. 15 with the melody. When sustaining on the word "I" in m. 16, the piano switches from sequencing to an ascending scale. Then the piano returns to sequencing in. m. 17 when the voice assumes the melody. This same effect continues and creates momentum for the exposed "mini cadenza" in the voice in mm. 19-20. Laitman's setting ends with a cluster chord of B, C#,D#,F#. The vocal line's sustained F#4 for three measures (see fig. 24) causes difficulty in determining if the F#4 is the fifth of a BM chord, or the root of an F# cluster chord. In addition, Laitman changes the piano texture in mm. 26-28, to include a new rhythmic sequence (see fig. 25). This change of texture and ambiguous harmonic treatment add to the inconclusiveness of Dickinson's text.

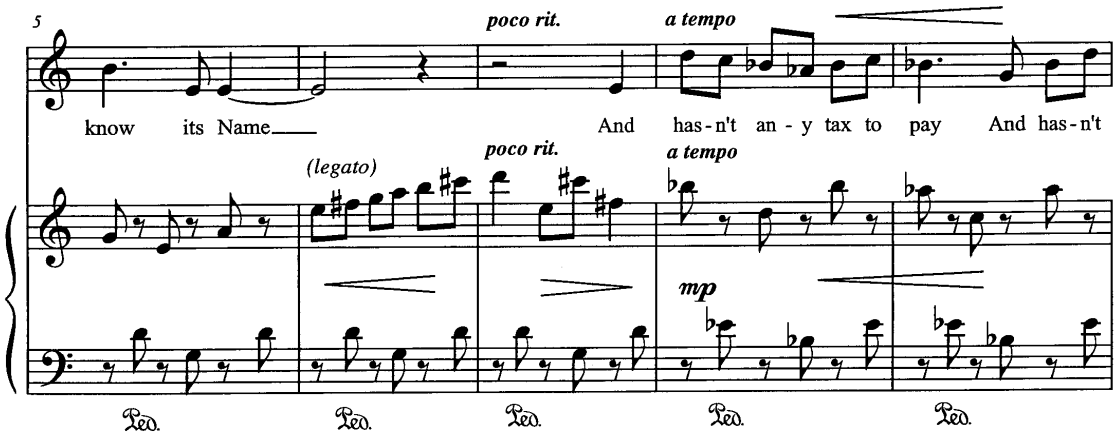


Figure 23, "The Butterfly upon," mm. 5-9

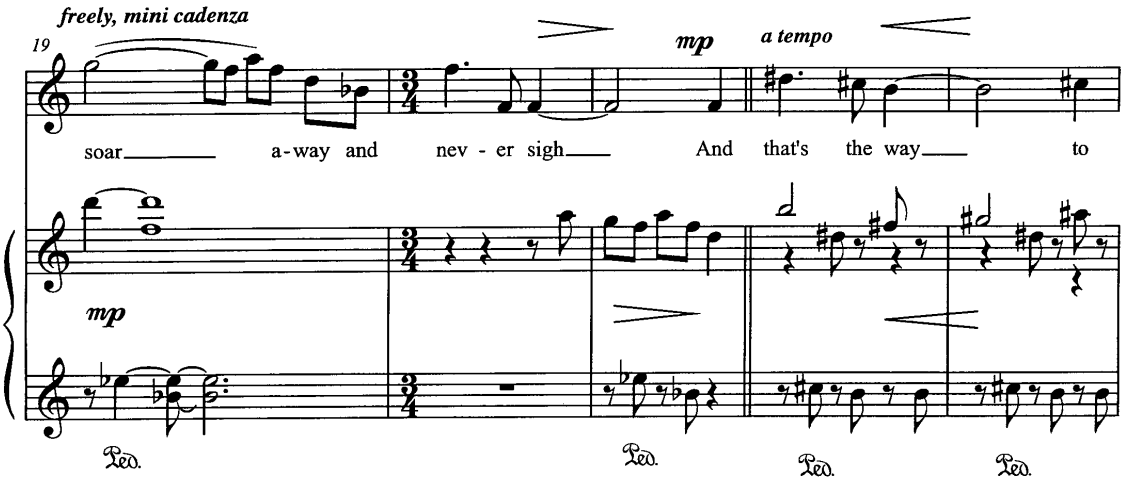


Figure 24, "The Butterfly upon," mm. 19-23

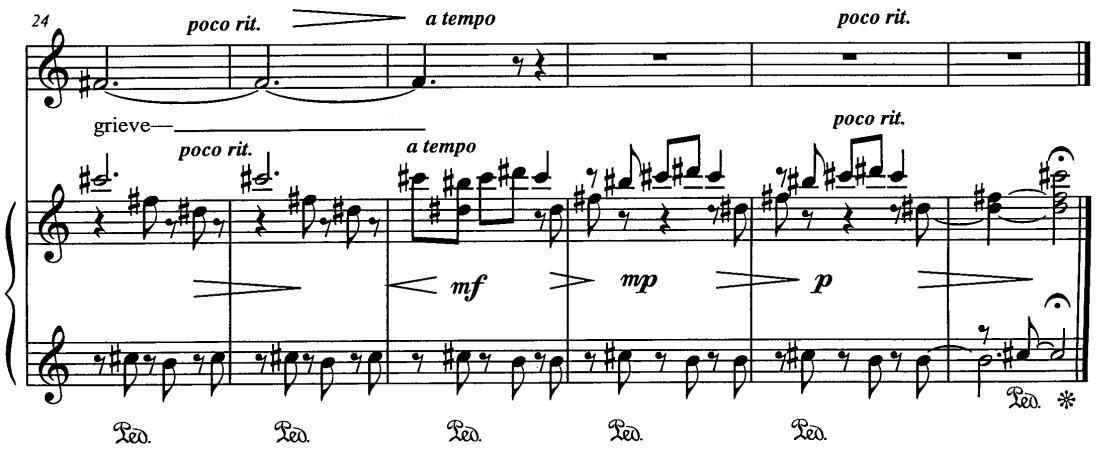


Figure 25, "The Butterfly upon," mm. 24-29

The second song in this cycle, "Hope is a strange invention," provides a contrast to the previous song, as it describes the consistency of "hope."

2. Hope is a strange invention

Hope is a strange invention—
A Patent of the Heart—
In unremitting action
Yet never wearing out—

Of this electric Adjunct
Not anything is known
But its unique momentum
Embellish all we own—[112]

Emily Dickinson*, 1392*

Dickinson's describes "Hope" as "strange," "unremitting," and "electric." The poem suggests that the act of hoping is not natural, but rather something that we as humans have created to help during dark times in life. Merriam-Webster defines

[112] Johnson, 597.

hope as "to cherish a desire with anticipation."[113] Dickinson explains that although "not anything is known" through Hope, everything "we own" or believe is inflated by hope. This "electric adjunct," provides a shock of energy to life, boosting one's spirit. This poem's theme is most closely linked to spirituality because it expresses the importance of hope in one's heart to bring vitality to life.

The setting of the poem is somewhat playful, suggesting the irony of hope's constant influence in life. Laitman says "the uniqueness of Dickinson's thought that 'hope is a strange invention" is underscored by quirky harmonies, and constant rhythmic motion in both voice and piano suggest[ing] the 'unremitting action.'"[114] This "constant rhythmic motion" although present in both the voice and the piano, is grounded by Laitman's treatment of the bass. For example, she takes opportunities throughout the song to bring out the ostinato through accents (see fig. 26). The tempo changes only during the words "all we." Laitman exaggerates the change in tempo, creating a unique opportunity for text painting. By restating the word "Hope" at the end, it is as if Laitman is creating a punch line to the ironic treatment of this word in the poem (see fig. 27).

[113] *Merriam-Webster,* "hope."

[114] Laitman, *One Bee and Revery*.

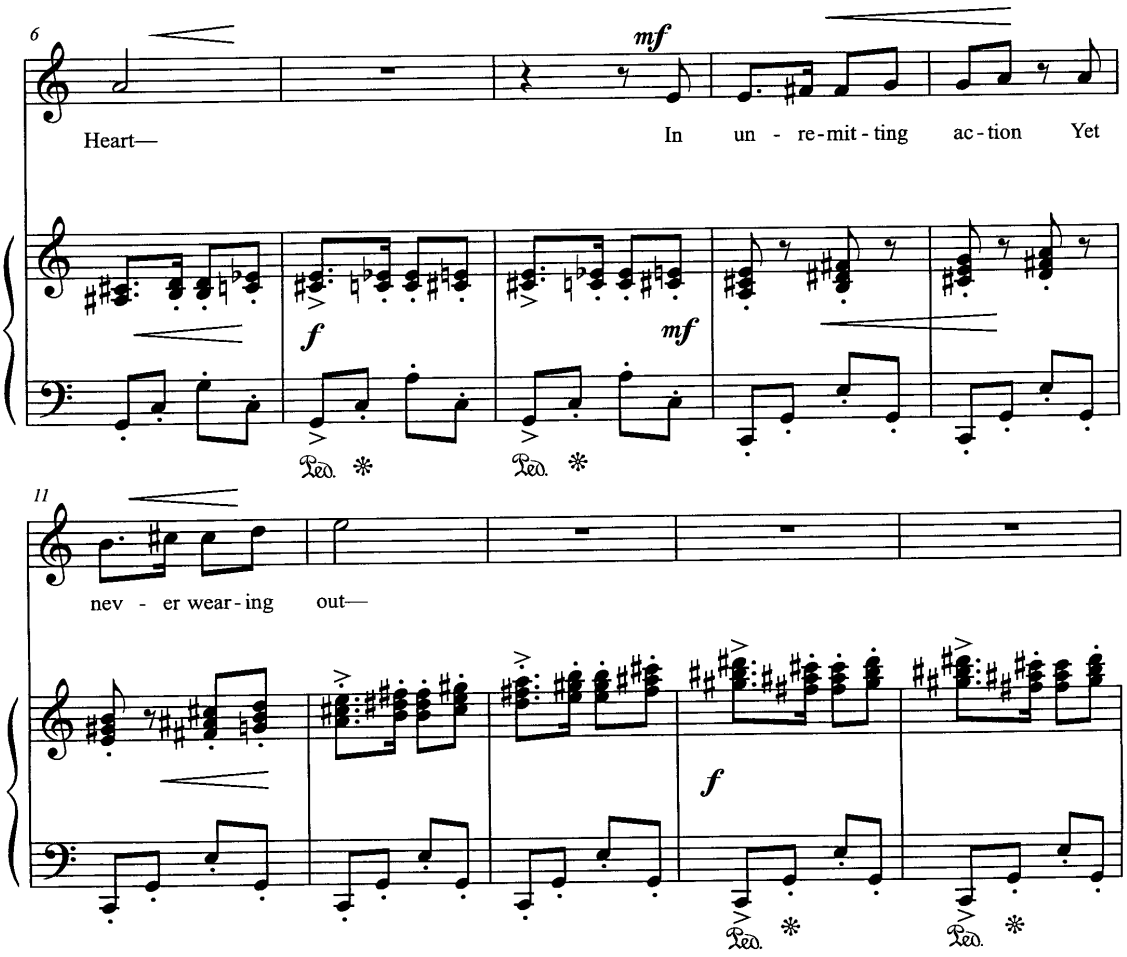


Figure 26, "Hope is a strange invention," mm. 6-15

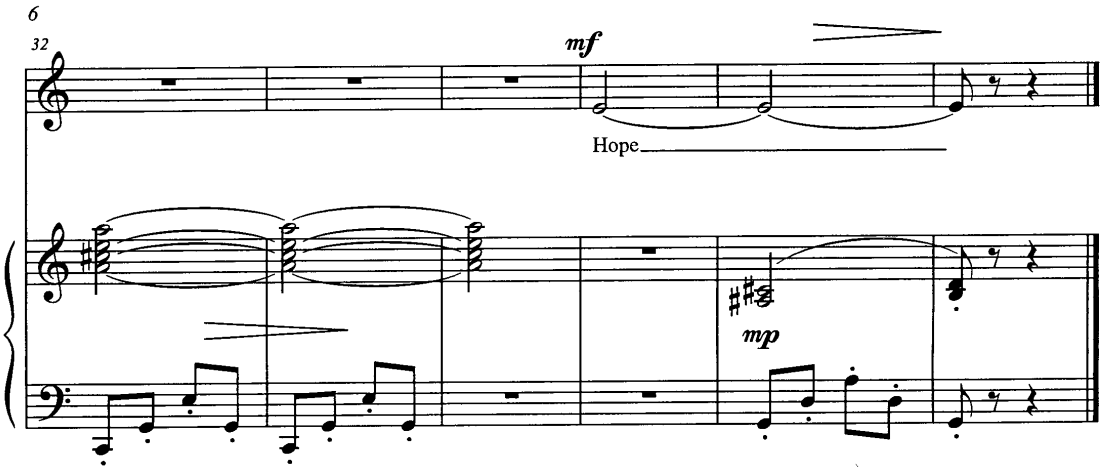


Figure 27, "Hope is a strange invention," mm. 6-11

The last poem for this cycle, "To Make a Prairie," is unique among all of Laitman's Dickinson settings because "no manuscript exists for this little epigram."[115] Helen Vendler, an expert on Emily Dickinson poetry, says that this poem "seems to sum up (in fewer than thirty words) all of Dickinson's work."

3. To Make a Prairie

> To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
> One clover, and a bee,
> And revery.
> The revery alone will do,
> If bees are few.[116]
>
> Emily Dickinson*, 1755*

Vendler explains that this poem can be viewed as a "recipe"[117] for a poem. Vendler explains that Dickinson's choice of "bee" and "clover" is a deliberate one, because a bee and a clover are a "sexual couple" making an exchange to create something. "Revery," or "use of the imagination" according to Webster,[118] is the main ingredient to this "recipe" of creating a poem, or in this case a "prairie" or body of work. After considering Vendler's interpretation of this seemingly simple poem, the theme of this poem could be love. Dickinson's vast output of poetry indicates the love she had for her craft.

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[115] Vendler, 522.

[116] Johnson, 710.

[117] Vendler, 524.

[118] Ibid., 522.

"Lyricism returns" to this last setting of the cycle, according to Laitman.[119] She explains "the main theme surfaces three times with dreamier harmonies under the middle repetition."[120] The main theme, or melodic sequence, is first stated in the voice in mm. 1-8 (see fig. 28). The second time, it appears again in the voice in mm. 9- 15. The third time it is heard in the form of a piano solo in mm. 18-24.

[119] Laitman, *One Bee and Revery*.

[120] Ibid.

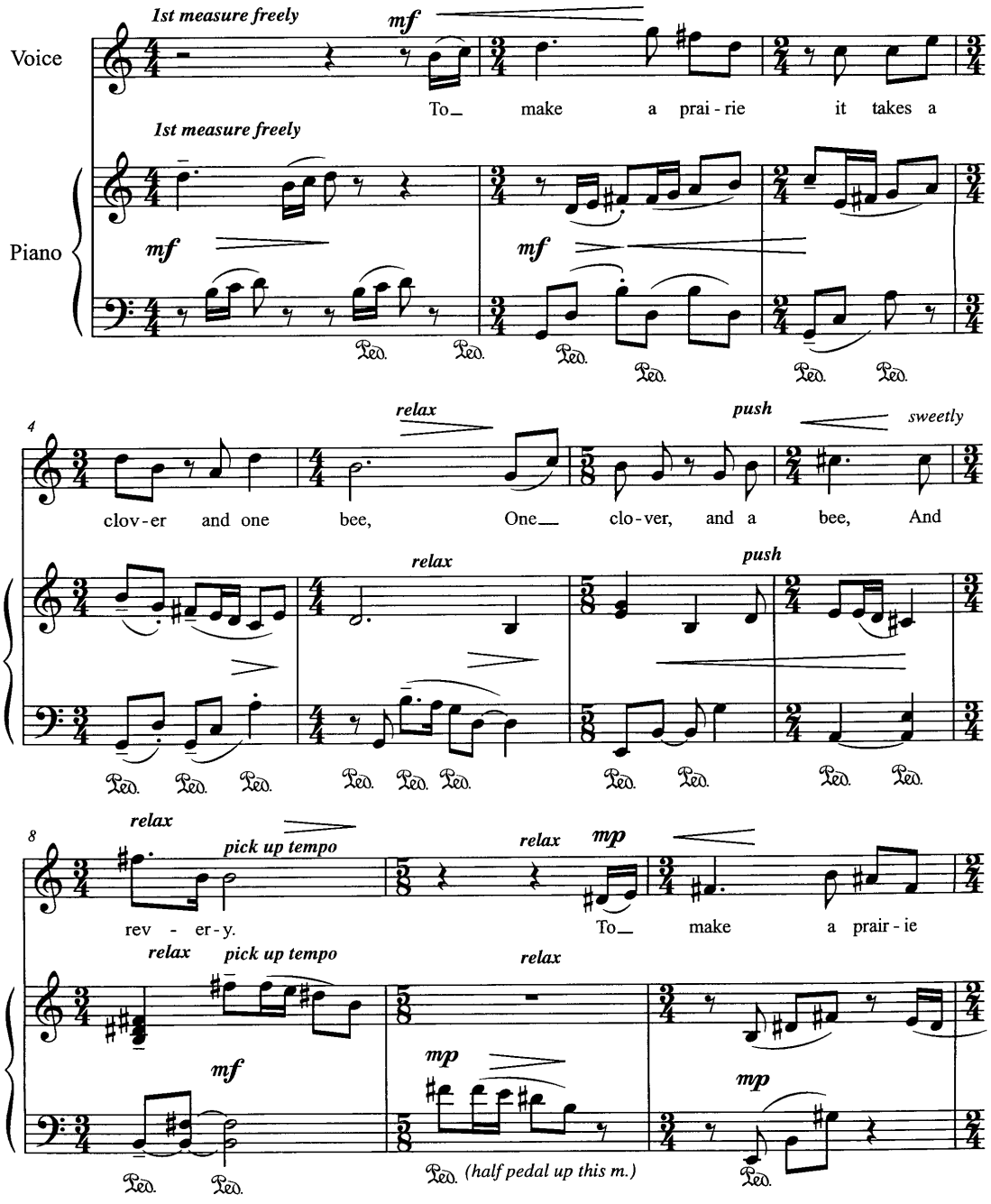

Figure 28, "To Make a Prairie," mm. 1-10

In addition to this melodic theme, Laitman also uses rhythmic motives. She repeats the rhythm of two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note throughout the song. This motive appears in both the piano and voice part (see fig. 29). Also, Laitman indicates freedom for the performance of this song by stating that the "base tempo"

is ♩=96, however the performers should "push/pull tempo (like a stretch fabric) throughout.[121]She also includes directions of when to feel these variations of tempo in her score, by indicating *relax*, *push*, *pick up tempo*, and *stretch here*. So although there should be freedom, she has indicated where the performers should feel the variations. The setting, though simple and tonal, contains many meter changes. This gives the piece an improvised quality, much like the setting of "If I…" in her *Four Dickinson Songs.* For example, system two contains four different meter markings (see fig. 28). The singer must organize where these meter changes occur to avoid mistakes during a performance.

Laitman chooses to highlight the ending line of the poem: "If bees are few." She creates a "punchline"[122]for the voice to bring out the humor of this line. She says that her own interpretation of "Dickinson's witty ending is reflected by a change in mood."[123]Although this section is marked "a tempo," there is a shift in musical speed as the end contrasts with the *ritardando* in mm. 24-26 (see fig. 31). This quick change adds to the humor that Laitman finds in the poem, thus creating a fitting ending for the cycle.

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Laitman, *One Bee and Revery*.

[123] Ibid.

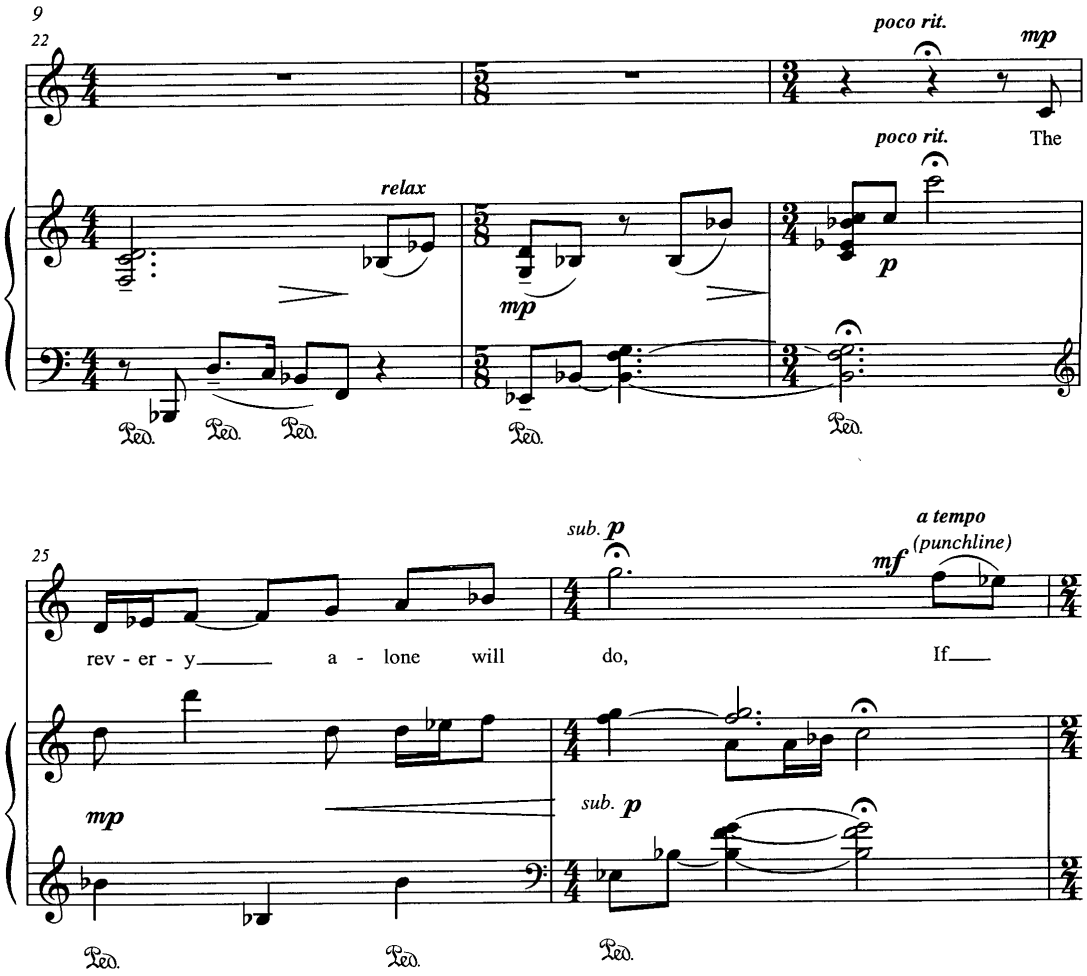

Figure 31, "To Make A Prairie," mm. 22-26

CONCLUSION

Four Dickinson Songs, *Between the Bliss and Me*, and *One Bee and Revery* have become important contributions to the American canon of Emily Dickinson settings. Laitman shares "I am certain that I will continue to write many more Dickinson cycles…I am astonished by her thought process and grateful for her vision. I love sharing her thoughts through music."[124] Although there is a dramatic arc found in all of these songs, Laitman does not use an overall Dickinson theme for each cycle. However, in *One Bee and Revery*, one might consider the overall theme as nature. Laitman explains that "both of the outer songs focus on the natural world, whereas the middle song focuses on human nature."[125]

We are fortunate to have excellent recordings of these cycles featuring pianist Warren Jones and soprano Jennifer Check. Jones is internationally recognized for his collaborations with highly recognized singers throughout the world. He was recently named "Collaborative Pianist of the Year" by *Musical America*.[126] Additionally, Check is gaining recognition as a singer, making frequent appearances with the Metropolitan opera.

Both artists performed *Four Dickinson Songs* and *Between the Bliss and Me* on Laitman's second solo album titled *Dreaming: Songs of Lori Laitman* in 2003. When asked about her collaborators for this CD, Laitman says "I was very intimidated by the

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[124] Laitman, interview by author.

[125] Latiman, interview by author.

[126] Warren Jones website, "biography" http://www.warrenjones.com/bio.html (accessed December 10th).

fact that I was working Warren Jones, so there were a few minor tempo suggestions I might have made, but did not—I was too scared to say anything." Even though a few tempi might not have been exactly what the composer envisioned, Gregory Berg writes in his article for the *Journal of Singing* that Jones "offers his usual brilliant work."[127] In regards to Check's performance he says:

> There are two sets of more serious and sedate songs featuring the poetry of Emily Dickinson, gorgeously sung by soprano Jennifer Check, who keeps her evidently large voice under very impressive control. She admirably contends with Laitman's occasional tendency to send the singer on sudden and somewhat jarring melodic ascents.[128]

Six years after the release of *Dreaming*, Jones and Check collaborated again on *One Bee and Revery* for Laitman's fourth solo album *Within These Spaces: Songs of Lori Laitman*. "By the time of the next recording," Laitman expounds, "I had learned to speak up more. And, working with them, I was able to make some minor changes that were helpful to the vocal line."[129] She also voices her gratitude to these artists and their collaboration for her Dickinson settings.

After studying these song cycles, one element of Laitman's compositional style remains constant: an unwaivering commitment to the honest expression of the text. Her approach, much like the *seconda practica*, is to create music that always seeks to support the text. The result is music that accurately and clearly delivers Dickinson's poetry in a manner that can be easily understood.

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[127] Gregory Berg, 322.

[128] Gregory Berg, 323.

[129] Laitman, interview by author.

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APPENDIX 1

COMPILATION OF LORI LAITMAN'S DICKINSON SETTINGS

1. *Days and Nights*, 1995, for soprano and piano

"Along with Me" (Robert Browning)

"They Might Not Need Me" (Emily Dickinson)

"The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" (Francis W. Bourdillon)

"Over the Fence" (Emily Dickinson)

"Song" (Christina Rosetti)

"Wild Nights" (Emily Dickinson)

2. *Four Dickinson Songs*, 1996, for soprano or mezzo soprano and piano

"Will there really be a Morning?"

"I'm Nobody"

"She Died"

"If I…"

3. *Between the Bliss and Me*, 1997, for soprano and piano, commissioned by Dr. Adelaid Whitaker

"I Gained it so"

"A Book"

"I Could not prove"

4. *Two Dickinson Songs*, 2002, for soprano and piano

"Good Morning Midnight"

"Wider than the Sky"

5. *One Bee and Revery*, 2003, soprano and voice

"The Butterfly upon"

"Hope is a Strange Invention"

"To Make A Prairie"

6. *Fresh Patterns*, 2003, for two sopranos and piano, commissioned by Steven Jordheim for Alisa Jordheim

"It's All I Have to Bring Today" (Emily Dickinson)

"A Letter for Emily Dickinson" (Annie Finch)

"Fresh Patterns" (Annie Finch and Emily Dickinson)

7. *The Perfected Life*, 2006, versions for all voice types and piano

"An Amethyst Remembrance"

"Dear March"

"The Perfected Life"

8. *In This Short Life*, 2010, for soprano and piano

"Some Keep The Sabath"

"I Stepped From Plank To Plank"

"In This Short Life"

9. *The Earth and I*, 2011, SATB a cappella choral cycle

"The Sun Went Down"

"The Sky is Low"

"The Wind"

10. *Come to Me in Dreams*, 2004, One-Act Chamber Opera

“I Did Not Manage to Save” (Jerzy Ficowski/ translated by Keith Bosley)

“Faults” (Sara Teasdale)

“Yes, That’s the Way Things Are” (“Koleba”)

“To-Night” (Sara Teasdale)

“Birdsong” (anonymous)

“Massacre of the Boys” (Tadeusz Rozewisz/ translated by Adam Czerniawski)

“Wild Nights” (Emily Dickinson)

“The Butterfly” (Pavel Friedman)

“The Years” (Sara Teasdale)

“Holocaust, 1944” (Anne Ranasinghe)

“Man Proposes, God Disposes” (“Koleba”)

“Jewels” (Sara Teasdale)

“The Garden” (Franta Bass)

“Both Your Mothers” (Jerzy Ficowski/ translated by Keith Bosley)

“Echo” (Christina Rossetti)

Appendix 2: Interview with Lori Laitman

MC: Why do you keep revisiting the poetry of Emily Dickinson for your songs? Does this have anything to do with your commissions or is it a personal choice?

LL: Dickinson's poetry has always appealed to me for the beauty of her language and her striking vision, which I find so unique. A "bonus" for composers is that her work is in the public domain. Since the majority of my Dickinson settings have been gifts — for birthdays or major occasions, the choice has been mine.

MC: In light of Dickinson's vast output, how do you choose which poems to use for your cycles?

LL: I find many of her poems to be too complex to be perfect for song – some, for me, are even too complex without song! I try to find poems that I think I understand so that I might "translate" them into music. Each song is my interpretation – and I hope that my musical gestures communicate my feelings both to the performers and to the audience.

MC: Once you discover a Dickinson poem that you know you must set, does that poem influence the other poems you choose for the cycle? Has that happened for any of the cycles discussed in this document?

LL: Yes, once I begin, I am always looking for other poems that might complement my first choice. With all of these particular cycles, I decided upon the first poem to set and then consciously looked for other poems that would allow for good dramatic flow and contrast. There is less of a "theme" to these cycles than in my more recent cycles. But, perhaps, in *One Bee and Revery*, the theme might be considered nature – as both of the outer songs focus on the natural world, whereas the middle song focuses on human nature.

MC: Are there any compositional devices that you use specifically for your Dickinson settings?

LL: I have always used "word painting" as a compositional device, although this is not specific to my Dickinson songs. Also, I employ a fair amount of repetition for dramatic effect in the earlier song cycles – but less so in the later *One Bee and Revery* (although there is a fair amount in the third song).

MC: Here are a few examples of word painting from *Four Dickinson Songs*
LL: In "Will There Really Be A Morning": the ascending lines match those of a question; the dissonance between voice and piano in m. 14 illustrates the "foreignness" of the countries, etc.

In “I’m Nobody” : the lower register and change of texture in the accompaniment gives more of a dreary feeling (to my mind) starting in m. 25; the accompaniment jumps about like a frog starting in m. 39…

In “She Died”: The sparseness of the accompaniment immediately sets the stage for a more somber poem. The ascent of the melody in m. 38 and 40-41 as she “started for the sun”; and I have the voice descend to a low Bb to portray the “mortal side” as a contrast. The piano ends the song, rising up to the “heavens.”

“If I…” : for me, the harmonic change from g minor to Ab major in m. 7-8 perfectly captures the meanings of the “aching” and “cool” ..the melisma on “fainting” is another portrait.

I do think that perhaps there is more mood-setting in these Dickinson songs, that perhaps they are less “micro-managed” than some of my more recent songs . But much of what I do is intuitive – not always conscious.

MC: Do you have any emotional, intellectual connections with Dickinson themes that would inspire you to write another Dickinson cycle?

LL: I am certain that I will continue to write many more Dickinson cycles. As I mentioned earlier, I am astonished by her thought process and grateful for her vision. I love sharing her thoughts through music.

MC: When working on the recordings *Dreaming* and *Within These Spaces*, how much influence did you have on the performances of Ms. Check and Mr. Jones?

LL: I was present at the recording sessions and certainly made some suggestions. However, in the case of the Dreaming CD, I was very intimidated by the fact that I was working with Warren Jones, so there were a few minor tempo suggestions I might have made, but did not – I was too scared to say anything. [What I would have said is that I would have preferred to have the music speed up and slow down a bit, to match the hairpins at the beginning of "Will There Really Be A Morning?".] By the time of the next recording, I had learned to speak up more. And, working with them, I was able to make some minor changes that were helpful to the vocal line – I think I took something down an octave for the recording at the very end of "I Could Not Prove."

I feel SO lucky to be working with Warren and Jennifer – and am completely grateful for their artistry.

MC: Carol Lines comments in her article for *The Journal of Singing* that your Dickinson settings "contain melismas, text repetition, and syncopation." She also says that "as a whole the piano serves a more rhythmical function in these settings through more vertical writing and repeated rhythmic figures." She says that this contrasts with the lyrical writing for settings by other poets. Was it your intention to make your settings of Dickinson unique from your other song repertoire?

LL: No, it was not a conscious decision. I always try to do my best to make a coherent interpretation of the poem. If there is a difference between my Dickinson songs and my settings of other poets, it is just because I interpret each poetic voice differently, but again, these differences are intuitive.

MC: The songs "If I…" and "To Make a Prairie" sound improvisational due to the flexibility established in tempo and meter changes. Was this your intention for these songs?

LL: My intentions are always the same: my desire is to set the words beautifully for the singer, so that the meanings can be conveyed to the audience, while creating a melody and accompaniment that provides a commentary on the text. I don't ever think "oh, I will make an improvisatory feel for this song by doing such and such" – but rather, I try to honor the words and create dramatic music for them. There is more about my process on the FAQs page of my website.

MC: In "A Book," your humorous interpretation of this poem is interesting. What about that poem caused you to find humor? And, what is your dramatic intention for the two additional "ty" syllables added to the word "liberty"?

LL: For me, the song takes "flight" with its quick tempo and its clear harmonies, meant to color the meanings behind the words. The humorous section arrives near

at the end, with the "Liberty" section. The addition of the extra "ber" and "ty" syllables was a way to expound on the meaning of the word….that with imagination, anything is possible. So I took my own liberties -- and the extreme vocal range also adds to this word painting. I just conceived of the last line as sort of a "punch" line and set it as such.

MC: In the song "I'm Nobody," you repeat the text "an admiring" three times through a descending melismatic sequence. Besides creating a humorous moment for the singer, is there a specific dramatic interpretation you have in mind for the singer?

LL: It is definitely a humorous moment. I would like the singer to be "diva-like," so as to be worthy of the bog's admiration. The guttural "g" at the end of the word "bog" adds to the humor.

MC: In the song "She died," do you interpret the deceased to be someone of a young age? Your piano writing during the words "her little figure" is reminiscent of a music box. Was this intentional or coincidental?

LL: I always thought that the person who died was a very old woman, and considered the "little figure" to be that of a very old person's shrunken stature. The accompaniment for "her little figure" being reminiscent of a music box was not intentional. When I was composing this, I knew exactly the sound and music I wanted but until I put it onto the computer, after pages of scrawling with pencil and

paper, I had no idea what the meters would be like. When I am composing, I generally do not put in bar lines, the music just flows. It isn't until I get to the computer to type the notes in that I best figure out the way to notate the music.

MC: The song "I Could Not Prove" contains key changes and unexpected melodic changes. Rather than moving up a half step, why did you choose to move down to the key of G for the third verse?

LL: Honestly, it was just the way I heard everything. I don't plan my songs out in advance, I find my way, getting all my clues and inspiration from the poetry as well as my own intuition. That key (G) was the key that sounded right to my ear. Interestingly, when we were recording this, we tried it up a half step, because it might have suited Jennifer's voice better – however, both Warren and I strongly felt that the new harmonic colors, even though all the relationships remained relative, somehow did not seem right for the words. So we kept everything as it was. It's almost as if certain keys have certain meanings and colors for me.

MC: The song "The Butterfly Upon" contains ambiguous harmonic treatment and change of texture in mm. 26-28. What is your purpose for these changes?

LL: It is here that the piano "catches" the voice motif attached to "that's the way to grieve" and repeats it, thereby emphasizing the idea. Ending with the ambiguous

harmony again, to me, is word painting – the piano just doing its thing, not "grieving," but soaring away like the butterfly.

MC: You repeat the word *Hope* at the end of "Hope is a Strange Invention." Are you creating a punchline for the song or are you bringing out the irony of the word in context of the poem?

LL: I don't view the word's repetition as ironic – but instead, as a dramatic effect. By repeating this word, I am commenting on the meaning of the entire poem – that hope is continually present.