

## if by yes

*if by yes*, a cycle of nine songs for tenor and harpsichord completed in 1994, is the result of a year of reading through the remarkable poetry of e. e. cummings.

the guiding principle throughout the entire compositional process has been  
the metrical flow of the poetry and the meaning of the words,  
which are the source of all the musical structures built around them.

some of these structures are dictated:

i.e. (anyone)'s "down they forgot as up they grew"  
inspired the descending and ascending cascade of notes in the accompaniment  
while (love's function)'s "while the whole moves and every part stands still"  
demands a musical parallel where layers are added  
but no individual line ever develops

other structures were interpreted:

i.e. the enumeration of incongruities in (long enough and just so long)  
suggested a musical incongruity  
- a motif which simultaneously uses a normal and a flat leading tone,  
likewise the impossibility to describe love in  
(nothing false and possible is love)  
is reflected in "impossible" alternating twelve and thirteen note configurations  
centered mostly around a high e  
which is unplayable on most harpsichords

although hailed today as an avatar of the avant-garde,  
e. e. cummings was often lyrical and romantic  
and many of his best poems adhere to conventional poetics,  
although he always managed to have something new to say  
within any framework.

three of the nine poems explored herein (the first, middle and last: 1, 5 & 9), in fact, are sonnets.

this symbiotic marriage of tradition and innovation was an underlying goal in the music created for these poems.

*if by yes* was premiered at the Work Space Gallery in the SoHo district of New York City in July 1996 by tenor Harlan deBell and harpsichordist Rebecca Pechefsky who helped to annotate the harpsichord registrations and articulations notated in this score. *if by yes* is ideally realized by a singer whose diction and tone production reflect idiomatic American English conventions accompanied on a double-manual harpsichord with an extensive range (to be able to play from to A" to e'') although judicious modifications can be made to the score in order to adapt it for performance on a single-manual harpsichord as well as on other instruments.

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