David Eisenband

Six Songs of Emily Dickinson

For High Voice and Piano
Six Songs of Emily Dickinson was composed for my graduation with distinction project during my senior year as an undergraduate student at Duke University. It was premiered by soprano Andrea Moore and pianist Glenn Mehrbach, to whom I owe great thanks. For this project the guidance of my advisor Professor Anthony Kelley has been invaluable, as has been that of Professor Stephen Jaffe.

I envision this song cycle as a dramatic whole, but the songs may be sung individually as well. Songs III and IV are related especially closely, and one might desire to sing them as a pair. The duration of the cycle is approximately twelve minutes.
Six Songs of Emily Dickinson

I. Because I could not stop for death
Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity –

II. I heard a fly buzz when I died
I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

III. I held it so tight that I lost it
I held it so tight that I lost it
Said the Child of the Butterfly
Of many a vaster Capture
That is the Elegy –

IV. If I can stop one heart from breaking
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.

V. Nature sometimes sears a sapling
Nature – sometimes sears a Sapling –
Sometimes – sears a tree –
Her Green People recollect it
When they do not die –

Fainter Leaves – to Further Seasons –
Dumbly testify –
We – who have the Souls –
Die oftener – Not so vitally –

VI. After great pain a formal feeling comes
After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions ‘was it He, that bore,’
And ‘Yesterday, or Centuries before’?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –
Six Songs of Emily Dickinson

I. Because I could not stop for death

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)  
David Eisenband

Lento moderato  \( \frac{d}{=} 50 \)

Because I could not stop for

Death He kindly stopped for me

The Carriage held but just Ourselves And
Immortality. We slowly drove. He knew no haste. And I had put away___

My labor and my leisure too, For His Civility.
We lightly, but growing heavier

Passed the School where Children strove
At Recess in the Ring
We

Passed the Fields of Ga-zing Grain
We passed the Set-ting Sun
Or

pesante

mp

pedale naturale
rather He passed Us
The Dews drew quiver-ing and Chill For on-ly
Gos-sa-mer, my Gown My tippet on-ly Tulle
We paused before a House that
32 seemed A Swelling of the Ground The

35 Roof was scarcely visible The Cornice in the

38 Ground Since 'tis Centuries and yet Feels
shorter than the Day

I first surmised the Horses’

Heads Were toward Eternity.
II. I heard a fly buzz when I died

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)  
David Eisenband

Andante espressivo  \( \frac{1}{4} = 80 \)

heard a Fly buzz when I died  
A Fly buzz  
The Stillness in the Room  
was like the Stillness in the
Air between the Heaves of Storm

The Eyes a-round had wrung them dry
And

Breaths were gathering firm
For
that last On-set when the King Be

witnessed in the Room I

willed my Keep-sakes Signed a-way What
portion of me be Assignable and

then it was There interposed a

Fly With

With
23. Blue uncertain stumbling Buzz Beetle

poco a poco decrescendo until m. 27

24. tween the light and me And

25. then the Windows failed and then I
could not see to

see

I heard a Fly buzz when I died

A Fly buzz.
III. I held it so tight that I lost it

Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886)

David Eisenband

Con moto

\[ \text{I held it so tight} \]

Said the Child of the Butterfly

Of
many a vast - ster

Capture that is the

elegy.

attacca
IV. If I can stop one heart from breaking

Emily Dickinson (1830-1866)

David Eisenband

If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain.

I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain.

Con brio \( \frac{d}{4} = 90 \)

Legato non troppo

Senza pedale

If

Legato naturale

Con pedale
If I can ease one life the
aching or cool one pain
Or help one fainting
Robin unto his nest again

\textit{molto legato}
If I can, If I can, If I can, I shall not live in vain.

legato non troppo

senza pedale
V. Nature sometimes sears a sapling

Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886)  David Eisenband

Grave $d = 40$

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Na-ture} & \quad \text{some-times sears a Sap-ling} \\
\text{So-mes-times scalps a Tree} & \quad \text{Her Green}
\end{align*}
\]

Peo-ple re-col-lect it When—— they do not die
Faint'er Leaves to Further Seasons Dumbly testify We who have the
Souls Die often-er Not so vitally

rit.
VI. After great pain a formal feeling comes

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

David Eisenband

After great pain, a formal feeling comes
Nerves sit cere moni ous, like Tombs
The stiff Heart questions 'was it
He that bore,' And 'Ye ster day, or Cen tu ries be fore'?
The Feet, mechanical, go round of Ground, or Air, or Ought - A

Woo-den way Regard-less grown, A Quartz con-tentment, like a stone

This is the Hour of Lead Re -

subito $p$ molto cresc.
membered, if out-lived, As Freezing persons, recol-

lect the snow first chill then stu-por__

then the letting go _

rallentando

April 28, 2010