"A thaw of bygone snow" Ten songs of love and loss



Ephrem Feeley

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These ten songs were written in the summer and autumn of 2007, and are musical reflections on the themes of love and loss, often portrayed together in literature. This is my first song cycle that explores a theme rather than consisting of disparate poems by a single poet. The ten poems chosen are by different authors: five of the texts are by female poets; my intention is that these are to be sung by a mezzo-soprano. The remaining five are by male poets, and it follows that these are to be sung by a baritone. The songs are to be performed in the order below, with baritone and mezzo-soprano alternating.

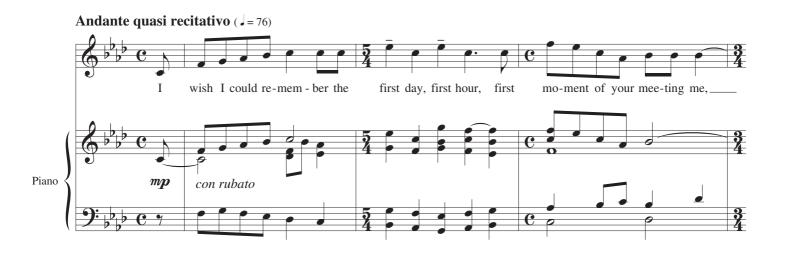
The title of the cycle is taken from a line in the opening song, The First Day, by Christina Rossetti. In the style of a recitative, this is sung wistfully, as the poet tries in vain to remember her first encounter with her beloved. This is followed by Love's Secret, a setting of a poem by William Blake. Behind the text is the sentiment that love unadmitted is in some way more authentic than love expressed. This setting is almost entirely strophic, with each of the three verses following a similar melodic pattern. A discordant piano interlude between the second and third verse mirrors the horror the poet's beloved feels upon learning of his love. The next song in the collection is Wild Nights, a robust setting of an Emily Dickinson poem. The fourth song, Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal, uses the Tennyson poem in a tender setting that is interrupted just once by a short dramatic interlude. There follows another Tennyson setting – Half the Night – which is taken from the much longer poem Maud. This poignant setting meanders through a chromatic, modal melody, capturing the poet's agony of waiting through the night for the beloved. The next song takes a sudden turn; There is a Lady Sweet and Kind is a frolicsome, almost humorous, setting of a poem on courtly love by Renaissance poet Thomas Ford, which is set in folksong-style. The seventh song in the cycle is a setting of Sonnet No. 13 If I Were Taken by the French Renaissance poet Louise Labé, translated by the American poet Annie Finch. This is a delicate setting, with crisp détaché writing in the piano part supporting an energetic vocal line. Towards the end – "I would rather die than live" - the tempo slackens, with sustained piano chords, to draw attention to the words, only to quicken pace again to complete the piece. The eighth song, Because She Would Ask Me Why I Loved Her, sets the poem by the Australian poet Christopher Brennan. The penultimate song, At Rest, uses the poem by American poet Sara Teasdale. Her references to "a fugue of Bach's" inspired me to borrow accompaniment themes from Bach's F minor Prelude and Fugue, over a ground bass for fourteen bars, which ceases once the tone of the poem changes, only to return again at the very end. The final song Love's Philosophy, sets a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, and concludes with the question that pervades the cycle: "what are all these kissings worth, if thou kiss not me?"

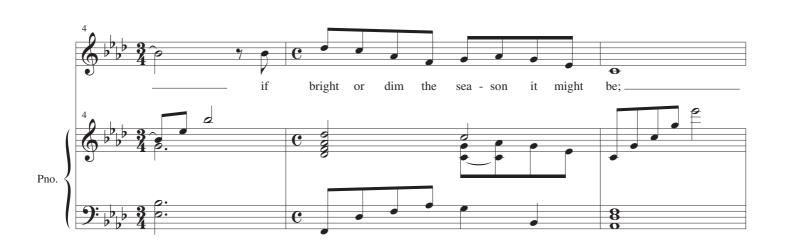
Ephrem Feeley October 10 2007

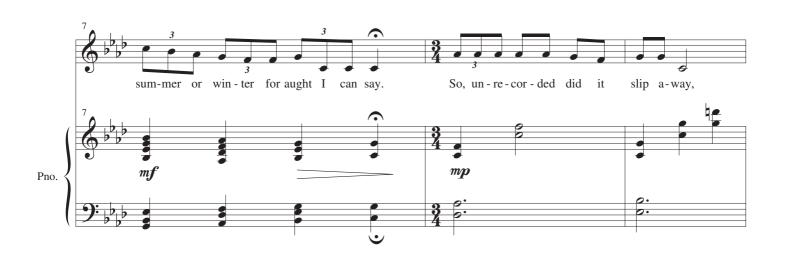
1)	The First Day	(Mezzo-Soprano)
ii)	Love's Secret	(Baritone)
iii)	Wild Nights	(Mezzo-Soprano)
iv)	Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal	(Baritone)
v)	Half the Night	(Mezzo-Soprano)
vi)	There is a Lady Sweet and Kind	(Baritone)
vii)	If I Were Taken	(Mezzo-Soprano)
viii)	Because She Would Ask Me If I Lov	ved Her (Baritone)
ix)	At Rest	(Mezzo-Soprano)
x)	Love's Philosophy	(Baritone)

The First Day

Words: Christina Rossetti Music: Ephrem Feeley







Love's Secret

Words: William Blake

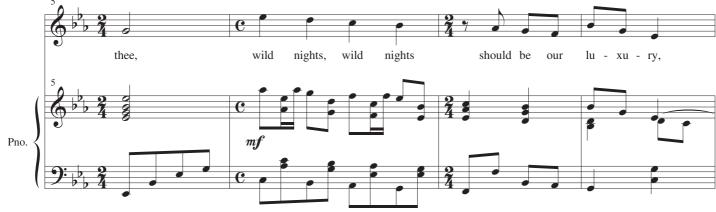
Music: Ephrem Feeley

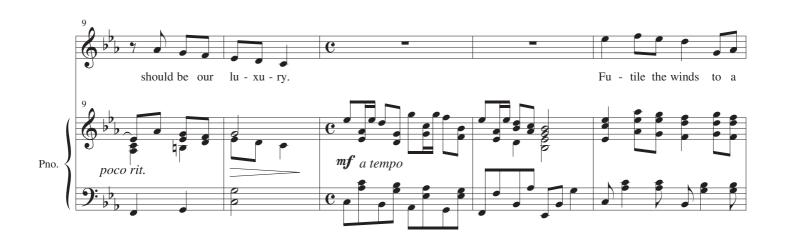


Wild Nights

Words: Emily Dickinson Music: Ephrem Feeley

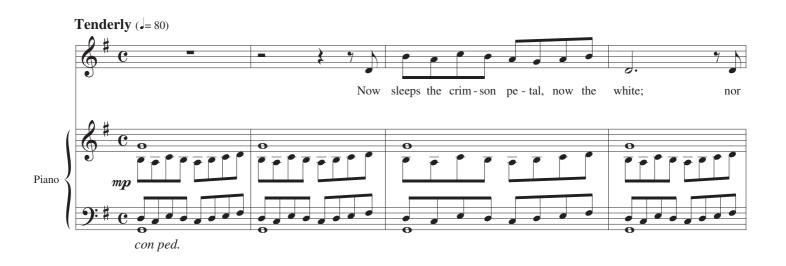


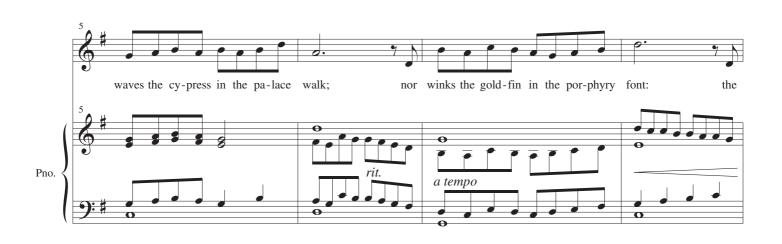


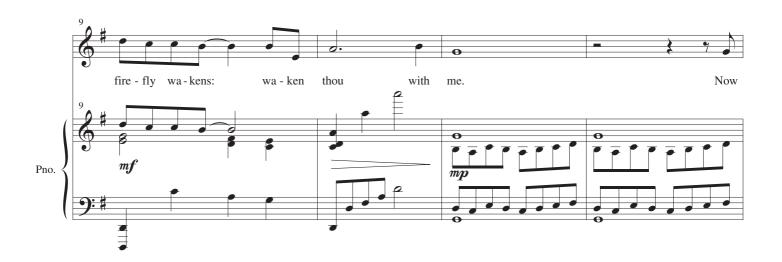


Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal

Words: Alfred Tennyson Music: Ephrem Feeley



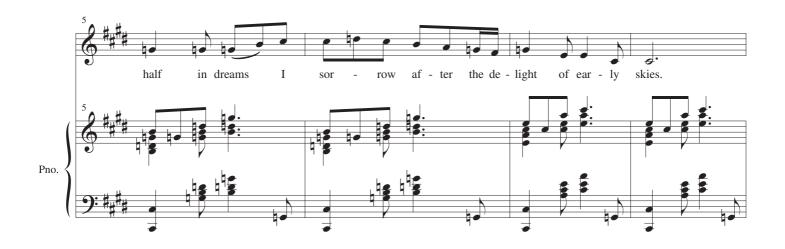


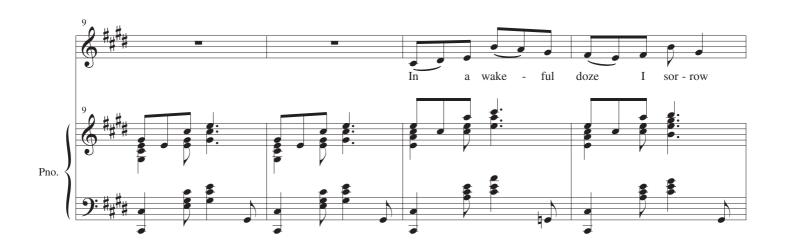


Half the Night

Words: Alfred Tennyson Music: Ephrem Feeley







If I were Taken

Words: Louise Labé
Translation: Annie Finch

Music: Ephrem Feeley



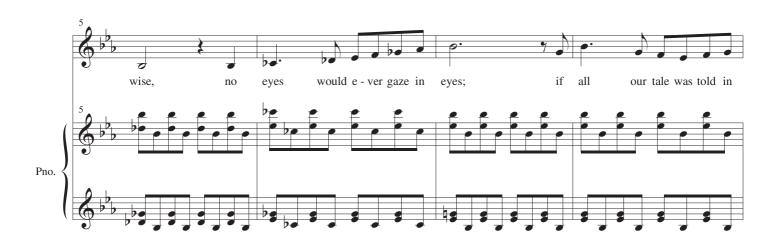




Because She Would Ask Me Why I Loved Her

Words: Christopher Brennan Music: Ephrem Feeley

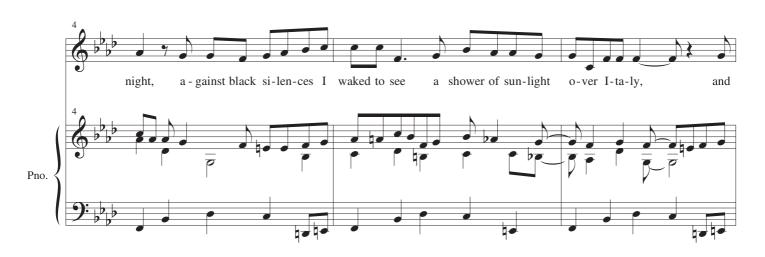






Words: Sara Teasdale Music: Ephrem Feeley







Love's Philosophy

Words: Percy Bysshe Shelley

Music: Ephrem Feeley

