
ROBERT G.
PATTERSON

Life Signs

*six songs on texts by Emily Dickinson
for soprano, horn, percussion, and piano
(1999)*

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Percussion

Bongos (2)
Vibraslap
Temple Blocks (5)

Finger Cymbals
Small Tam-tam (Water Gong)
Medium Tam-tam
Suspended Cymbal

Glockenspiel
Vibraphone

Texts by Emily Dickinson

1

Surgeons must be very careful
When they take the knife!
Underneath their fine incisions
Stirs the Culprit – *Life!*

2

I Years had been from Home
And now before the Door
I dared not enter, lest a Face
I never saw before

Stare stolid into mine
And ask my Business there –
“My Business but a Life I left
Was such remaining there?”

I leaned upon the Awe –
I lingered with Before –
The Second like an Ocean rolled
And broke against my ear –

I laughed a crumbling Laugh
That I could fear a Door
Who Consternation compassed
And never winced before.

I fitted to the Latch
My Hand, with trembling care
Lest back the awful Door should spring
And leave me in the Floor –

Then moved my Fingers off
As cautiously as Glass
And held my ears, and like a Thief
Fled gasping from the House –

4

A little Snow was here and there
Disseminated in her Hair –
Since she and I had met and played
Decade had gathered to Decade –

But Time had added not obtained
Impregnable the Rose
For summer too indelible
Too obdurate for Snows –

5

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!

3

The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –
Forgets her own locality –
As I – toward Thee –

She knows herself an incense small –
Yet *small* – she sighs – if *All* – is *All* –
How *larger* – be?

The Ocean – smiles – at her Conceit –
But *she*, forgetting Amphitrite –
Pleads – “Me”?

6

I should not dare to leave my friend,
Because – because if he should die
While I was gone – and I – too late –
Should reach the Heart that wanted me –

If I should disappoint the eyes
That hunted – hunted so – to see –
And could not bear to shut until
They “noticed” me – they noticed me –

If I should stab the patient faith
So sure I’d come – so sure I’d come –
It *listening* – listening – went to sleep –
Telling my tardy name –

My Heart would wish it broke before –
Since breaking then – since breaking then
–
Were useless as next morning’s sun –
Where midnight frosts – had lain!

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Life Signs

for soprano, horn, percussion, & piano

Text by
EMILY DICKINSON

Music by
R. G. PATTERSON
(1999)

I.

Breezy and didactic (♩=120)

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. From top to bottom: 1. Horn in F (actual sounds) in 2/4 time, starting with a rest and then playing a melodic line marked *p* jauntly. 2. Vibraphone in 2/4 time, playing a triplet of eighth notes marked *mf* and *acc.*. 3. Voice in 2/4 time, with a whole rest. 4. Piano (right hand) in 2/4 time, playing a bass line marked *p*. 5. Piano (left hand) in 2/4 time, playing a bass line.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. From top to bottom: 1. Horn in F (actual sounds) in 2/4 time, playing a melodic line marked *fz*. 2. Vibraphone in 2/4 time, playing a triplet of eighth notes marked *fz* and *acc.*. 3. Voice in 2/4 time, with a whole rest. 4. Piano (right hand) in 2/4 time, playing a bass line marked *fz*. 5. Piano (left hand) in 2/4 time, playing a bass line marked *mf*.

24

Musical score for measures 24-28. The system includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a rest, then enters with the lyrics "Stirs the Cul-prit— Life!". The piano accompaniment features complex textures with triplets and various dynamics. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *ff*, and *pp sub.*, along with performance instructions like "open" and "red. * etc.". The vocal line is marked with *ff* and *pp sub.* in the first system. The piano accompaniment has *ff* and *pp sub.* markings. The lyrics "Stirs the Cul-prit—" and "Life!" are written below the vocal line.

29

Musical score for measures 29-31. This system continues the piano accompaniment from the previous system. It features dense chordal textures and melodic lines in both hands. The key signature remains one flat, and the time signature is 2/4. Dynamic markings include *ff* and *ff red.*. There are also triplet markings in the piano part.

32

Musical score for measures 32-34. This system continues the piano accompaniment. It features a prominent melodic line in the right hand with a *mf* dynamic, and a more active bass line. The key signature remains one flat, and the time signature is 2/4. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *ffz*. The system concludes with a double bar line.

II.

Deliberate and Reflective (♩=80)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Vibraslap

Voice

Piano

fz (poco) *l.v.* *p poco marc.*

I Years had been from Home

f *fz* *p poco marc.*

Red. sempre

5

Vslp.

pp menacing

fz (poco)

f *fz*

Red.

9

S.Tam.
yarn mallets
(one-handed roll)

pp gliss. by dipping in water *p*

And now be fore the Door

p

Red.

15

15

pp

S. Tam. *pp*

f

I dared— not

f

Red.

20

20

mf quasi recit.

en-ter,— lest— a Face I nev-er saw— be - fore Stare— stol-id in-to mine

fz

p

f

Red.

*

Red.

23

23

muted

p

Vslp. *p*

T. Blk. *yarn mallets* *p*

insistent

And ask— my Busi - ness there—

fz

p

Red.

28

mute out

M.Tam. (yarn mallet) *p*

naive, simple tone
pp (imitate a child singing)

“My Busi-ness but a Life I left Was such re-main-ing there?” —

pp

*

32

stopped

T.Blk. *mf* (yarn mallets)

mf *fp* *più f*

(normal tone) *mf poco marc.* *più f*

I leaned up - on - the Awe - I ling - ered

mf *più f*

Red. *Red.*

36

T.Blk. *fz* *n*

fp *fz* *f* somewhat free

with - Be - fore - The Sec - ond like an O -

mf *indistinct*

Red. *Red. sempre*

39

cean rolled And rolled And

Red. *Red.* *Red.*

41

Vslp. $\frac{3}{4}$ (hand) *f* *hard mallet*

T.Blk. $\frac{3}{4}$

broke a - gainst my ear - I laughed a

ff *ffz* *ff*

Red. * *Red.* * *Red.*

44

M.Tam. $\frac{3}{4}$ *tam-tam beater* *f with dire menace*

Vslp. $\frac{3}{4}$

T.Blk. $\frac{3}{4}$

crum - - - bling Laugh That I could

ffz *ff*

Red.

57

Vslp. *Hand,* with trem - bling

Red.

59

T.Blk. *soft mallets*

care Lest back the aw - - - ful

Red.

62

T.Blk. *(soft mallets)*

Door — should spring And leave me in — the Floor —

pp

Red.

continue holding pedal thru rests

68

M. Tam. *pp*

pp (*poco marc.*)

pp soft yarn mallet

Then moved my Fingers off As cautious-

pp *l.v.*

73

Glock. *pp* *trgl. beaters*

pp *sotto voce quasi recit.*

ly as Glass And held my ears, and like a

78

Glock.

(poco accel.)

Thief Fled gasping from the House-

III.

Breathless (♩=152)

Finger Cymbals

Voice

Piano

p delicate, flighty

5 F. Cym.

p coy

The Drop, that wres - tles

9 F. Cym.

in the Sea — For - gets her

13
F. Cym.

own lo - cal - - - - -

17

- - - i - ty -

22

27
F. Cym. (♩=♩)
Sus. Cym.

wire brushes *pp* *fz* *p* *l.v.*

As I - - - to - ward Thee - - -

8va

34

She knows her-

Musical score for measures 34-38. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "She knows her-". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and block chords in the left hand.

39

self an in - cense small—

Musical score for measures 39-43. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "self an in - cense small—". The piano accompaniment maintains the complex sixteenth-note texture.

44

Yet small— she sighs— if All— is

Musical score for measures 44-48. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Yet small— she sighs— if All— is". Four groups of four sixteenth notes are marked with a bracket and the number "4". The piano accompaniment continues with its characteristic texture.

49

All—

Musical score for measures 49-53. The vocal line has the lyrics "All—". The piano accompaniment features a final section with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking. Time signatures of 9/16 and 6/16 are indicated.

54 *pp*

How larg - er - be?

61 *Sus. Cym.* felt mallets *p* *f* *l.v.*

The O - - - - cean - smiles - at

67 *mp*

her - Con - ceit - But she, -

72 *F. Cym.* *ff* *pp sub.* *p*

for - get - ting Am - phi - tri - te -

8va

mf *ffz*

80

F. Cym.

p Pleads— "Me"? Pleads— *f*

(8va)

91

F. Cym.

f

96

"Me"?

102

Sus. Cym.

dead stroke
snare stick *fz* *fz* *fz* *fz* felt mallet *fz* kill sound

8va *fz* *fz* *fz* *ffz*

IV.

Rhapsodic; introspective (♩=60)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Voice

Piano

pp

Red.

Red.

Red.

8

p *songful*

(8va)

p

Red.

16

p

A lit-tle Snow _____ was here _____ and there

pp *echo*

23

A lit-tle Snow Dis - sem-i-nat-ed in her Hair-

p

And.

30

p

pp extremely delicate

Sva

37

Since she and I had met

p *mf*

mf

42

Musical score for measures 42-46. The system includes a bass line, a vocal line, and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "and played — De-cade had gath-ered to De-cade —". The piano accompaniment features complex chords and triplets. Dynamics include *f* and *p*.

47

Musical score for measures 47-53. The system includes a bass line, a vocal line, and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is mostly silent with a final note marked *p* *songful*. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf*. An *8va* marking is present above the right hand.

54

Musical score for measures 54-60. The system includes a vocal line, a treble piano line, and a bass piano line. The vocal line has a melodic line with triplets. The piano accompaniment features chords and triplets. Dynamics include *p*.

62 *poco accel.* *a tempo*

pp

But—

70

p

Time had add - ed But Time had add - ed

pp

77

mf *f*

mf *f*

not ob - tained Im - preg - na - ble the

mf *f*

Red. Red. Red.

81

Rose

84

For sum - mer

91

too in - del - i - ble — For sum - - - mer too in - del - i - ble

96

For sum - mer — too in - del - i - ble For

104

Musical score for measures 104-108. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a rest, then enters with the lyrics "sum - mer too in - del - i - ble" at measure 105, followed by "Too ob - dur - ate" at measure 106, and "for" at measure 107. The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns in both hands, with a *mf* dynamic at the start and a *f* dynamic at measure 106. The piano part includes *Red.* markings at the bottom of the staves.

109

Musical score for measures 109-118. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a rest at measure 109, then enters with the lyrics "Snows—" at measure 110, and "Too ob - dur - ate" at measure 111. The piano accompaniment features a *fz* dynamic at measure 109 and a *pp* dynamic at measure 110. The piano part includes a *Red.* marking at the bottom of the staff at measure 111.

119

Musical score for measures 119-123. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a rest at measure 119, then enters with the lyrics "for Snows—" at measure 120. The piano accompaniment features a *pp* dynamic at measure 119 and a *pp* dynamic at measure 120. The piano part includes a *Red.* marking at the bottom of the staff at measure 120.

V.

Primitive and throbbing (♩=120)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Bongos

Voice

hands:
x = heel
• = fingers

7

pp

pp *pp* *mf*

p but energetic

I'm No-bod-y! Who are you?

12

mp

p *mf* *p* *mf* *fz* *p*

Are you— No-bod - y— Too? Then there's a

16

mp *fz* *mf*

p *mp* *fz* *mf*

mp

pair of us? Don't tell! they'd- ad - ver - tise—

20

mf *fz* *pp*

you know!_____

26

mf *mp* *mf* *f*

How drear - y- to be-_____

32

mf *p* *mf* *f*

Some - bod - - - y! How pub - lic-__

37

p *fz* *p* *pp*

like a Frog-_____

43

mf

p

To tell one's name — the live — — — long June —

49

f

fz *fz p* *f*

f *ff*

To tell one's name — To an ad -

54

p

ff *fp* *pp*

fp

mir - - - - - ing Bog! - - - - -

59

mf *pp* *ff*

ff

(g!)

VI.

Instrospective (♩=50)

Horn in F
(actual sounds)

Voice

Piano
ff desolate; declamatory

And. sempre

Tam. *tam-tam beater*
l.v.

Vib. *ppp*

bowed *l.v.* *ppp*

ppp
And. sempre

Piano
pp tranquil

(And.)

Tam. *muted*

Vib. *ppp*

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *medium mallets pp*

(And. sempre)

I should — not dare — to leave — my friend, —

(And. sempre)

24

pp mf pp pp mf pp mp

Vib. mf f

reach the Heart that want-ed me

26

Tam. tam-tam beater ppp

ff very declamatory pp

(*And. sempre*)

29

Vib. muted pp

(medium mallets) pp (*And. sempre*)

pp

If I should

(pp)

33

Vib.

Sus. Cym. (vib. mallet) *ppp*

dis - ap - point the eyes That hun - ted

8va

37

Vib. *pp*

the eyes That hun - ted

8va

40

Vib.

hun - ted so - to see - hun - ted to see -

8va

43

Vib. *p* *songful*

mf

And could not bear to shut un - til They "no - ticed" me -

46

f

they no - - - ticed me -

f

Red. sempre

49

Tam. (vib. mallet) *f* (still muted)

Vib. *mf* *Red. sempre* *f* *mf*

If I If I

mf *f* *mf*

55

Vib. *ff marc.* *mf*

Glock. *soft rubber mallets* *mf*

ff marc. *mf*

So sure I'd come— so sure I'd come—

(8va) *ff marc.*

58

Vib. *pp* (*sed. sempre*)

Glock. *pp*

pp

It lis-tening—

mf *p* *pp*

62

Vib.

lis - - - - - tening—went to sleep— Tell - - - - - ing

p

66

Vib.

— my tar - - - - - dy name—

p

69

Vib.

Glock.

mf

mp

mf

mf

72 Vib. *pp* (vib. mallet) *ppp* *pp*

Tam. *ppp* *pp*

fz

76 Vib. *ppp* (vib. mallet) *ppp* *pp* *ppp*

bowed *l.v.* *ppp* (*red. sempre*) *ppp*

pp tranquil

(*red.*)

83 (*still muted*) *pp* *ppp* *ppp*

Vib. *pp* *ppp* *ppp*

My Heart would wish My Heart would wish it

87 *Glock.* (*soft rubber mallets*) *ppp* *ppp*

broke be - fore -

8va

90

Glock.

ppp

Since break - ing then — since break - ing then — Were use - less —

94

ppp
Cym. (vib. mallet)
ppp

— as next — morn - ing's sun — Where mid - night

98

ppp

Vib.

ppp

(bowed)
ppp

— Where mid - night — frosts — had lain!

