
ROBERT G.
PATTERSON

Life Signs

*six songs on texts by Emily Dickinson
for mezzo-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 mezzo-soprano, horn, percussion, & piano

Text by
EMILY DICKINSON

Music by
R. G. PATTERSON
(1999)

I.

Breezy and didactic (♩=120)

Musical score for the first system of 'Life Signs'. It features four staves: Horn in F (actual sounds), Vibraphone, Voice, and Piano. The time signature is 2/4. The Horn part begins with a *p* *jaunty* melody. The Vibraphone part has a *mf* *sed.* melody with a triplet. The Voice part is silent. The Piano part has a *p* accompaniment.

Musical score for the second system of 'Life Signs', starting at measure 6. It features four staves: Horn in F (actual sounds), Vibraphone, Voice, and Piano. The time signature changes to 3/4 and then back to 2/4. The Horn part has a *fz* melody. The Vibraphone part has a *fz* *sed.* melody with triplets. The Voice part is silent. The Piano part has a *fz* accompaniment.

10

fz *Red.* *fz* *Red.* *fz* *Red.* *p jaunty*

Sur - geons must be ve - ry care - ful

15

fz *mf* *f Red.*

When they take the knife! Un - der - neath their fine in - ci - sions

19

stopped *pp* *mp*

8va -

Stirs the Cul - prit -

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.

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) *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

yarn mallets
(one-handed roll)

S.Tam.

pp gliss. by dipping in water *p*

And now be fore the Door

p

Red.

15

Musical score for measures 15-19. The score includes a bass line, a Snare Drum (S. Tam.) part, a vocal line, and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *f* (forte). The vocal line includes the lyrics "I dared— not".

20

Musical score for measures 20-22. The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *mf quasi recit.* (mezzo-forte quasi recitativo), *fz* (forzando), *p* (piano), and *f* (forte). The vocal line includes the lyrics "en-ter,— lest— a Face I nev-er saw— be - fore Stare— stol-id in-to mine".

23

Musical score for measures 23-27. The score includes Violoncello (Vslp.), Trombone (T. Blk.), a vocal line, and a piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *muted p* (piano muted), *p* (piano), and *fz* (forzando). The vocal line includes the lyrics "And ask— my Busi - ness there—".

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. (yarn mallets) *mf*

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

Red. * Red. * Red.

44

M.Tam. *tam-tam beater* *f with dire menace*

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

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

crum - - - bling Laugh That I could

Red.

48

M. Tam.

Vslp.

fear a Door Who Con

ffz

Ped.

Ped. sempre

51

ster na tion com - - passed And

53

M. Tam.

Vslp.

nev - er winced be - - fore. I fit - ted to the Latch - My

ffz

ffz

ffz

Ped.

Ped.

continue holding pedal thru rests

57

Vslp. *Hand,* with trem - bling

Ped.

59

T.Blk. *soft mallets*

f *f* *fp*

care Lest back the aw - - - ful

Ped.

62

T.Blk. *(soft mallets)*

pp *pp*

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

Ped.

continue holding pedal thru rests

68

M. Tam. *pp*

pp (poco marc.)

soft yarn mallet

Then moved my Fingers off As cautious-

pp

l.v.

red.

73

Glock.

trgl. beaters

pp

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* *pp* *l.v.* *p*

As I— to-ward Thee—

8va *fz* *p*

34

She knows her -

This system contains measures 34 through 38. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 34, followed by a half note in measure 35, and then a quarter note in measure 36. The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with eighth-note patterns and a left hand with chords and eighth notes.

39

self an in - cense small -

This system contains measures 39 through 43. The vocal line continues with a half note in measure 39, a quarter note in measure 40, and a half note in measure 41. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns.

44

Yet small - she sighs - if All - is

This system contains measures 44 through 48. The vocal line features four groups of four sixteenth notes, each marked with a '4' above a bracket. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note patterns.

49

All -

pp

This system contains measures 49 through 53. The vocal line has a whole note in measure 49, followed by a half note in measure 50, and then a quarter note in measure 51. The piano accompaniment includes a change in time signature to 9/16 in measure 51 and 6/16 in measure 52. The system ends with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking.

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* *mf* *ffz* *8va*

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

80

F. Cym.

p *f*

Pleads— “Me”? Pleads—

(8va)

91

F. Cym.

f *f*

9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16

96

f *f*

“Me”?

9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16

102

Sus. Cym.

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

fz *ffz*

9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16 9/16 6/16

8va

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 little Snow _____ Dis - sem-i-nat-ed in her Hair— _____

p

And.

3

3

3

3

3

3

30

p

8va—

pp extremely delicate

3

3

3

3

3

37

p *mf* *mf*

Since she and I _____ had met _____

mf

3

3

3

3

42

and played De-cadehad gath-ered to De-cade—

f *f* *p*

47

p songful

8va

mf

54

p

62 *poco accel.* *a tempo*

pp
But_

70

p

Time had add - ed But Time had add - ed

pp

77

mf *f*

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

mf *f*

Led. Led. Led.

81

Rose

84

pp 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

mf

f

sum - mer — too in - del - i - ble — Too — ob - dur - ate — for

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

109

fz *pp*

fz *pp*

Snows — Too — ob - dur - ate

Red.

119

muted *pp*

pp

for Snows —

Red.

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* *fz*

like a Frog - _____

43

mf

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

ff

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

pp tranquil

(And.)

muted

Tam. *pp*

Vib. *ppp* *medium mallets pp*

ppp *ppp* *ppp* *(And. sempre)*

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

(And.)

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

(*red. sempre*)

29

Vib. *medium mallets* pp (*red. 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 -

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

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!

