



Origami Letters

*For Tenor Voice
and String Quartet*

Part for Cello

Words and Music by

Nigel Morgan

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About the Music

In the Spring of 2009 I received a packet of letters written on sheets of coloured and patterned Origami paper. In a world where the art and practice of letter-writing seems to be diminishing an envelope of letters was a treat, a rare gift. A dear friend, now a textile artist of some distinction, was completing an academic assignment whilst staying in her childhood home. Over three days and two nights she wrote letters on the back of origami paper full of gentle observations of her home, springtime, of children, of family celebrations, and walks under the broad skies of Lincolnshire.

I returned this gift with a sequence of poems meaning to set them to music for tenor voice and string quartet. The scoring was inspired by *The Juliet Letters*, a collaborative song cycle devised by the Brodsky Quartet for Elvis Costello. My setting was completed later in 2009 for the tenor Mark Padmore and the Brodsky Quartet. But like Paul Hindemith and his *Das Marienleben* settings of Rilke I was unsatisfied by this setting and in the spring of 2014 rewrote the whole work. Instead of resetting the poems 'as is' I made quite substantial changes and cuts, not just to the text as a whole but the way I treated the flow of words, this time using repetitions and re-orderings to create emphasis and musical effects.

Musically, the score was wholly recomposed using a number of algorithmic devices to generate a unique harmonic 'world'. The work was planned in two versions: for voice and keyboard; for voice and string quartet. In the former an aesthetic concept similar to the contemplative web artefact *Fifteen Images* was adopted, designing a score particularly suited to the art of the improvising pianist who is encouraged to treat the harmonic language with considerable freedom in choice of registration, voicing and figuration.

Performance Notes

Dynamics, articulations, tempo and expressive markings should be considered as starting points, no more. The recommended mode of performance for string quartet should be one of restraint and simplicity.

I

Fold upon fold
your origami letters
map thoughts,
images and moments
of three days,
two nights.

Now to unfold
the creased trajectories,
intersecting space,
following time:
bird-like flightpaths
on the radar screen.

Each coloured sheet,
placed on this desk,
becomes a tessellated diary,
and grows beneath the hand.
So generous a gift.
So readily received.

II

Ah, that's your secret:
the power of the list;
this, then this,
then freedom follows,
knowing the necessities
dusted and done.

Peaceful now,
and watching the clouds
cross the skylight,
Bach decorates your soul
with his meditations
on the possibility of everything.

How did you guess
I love the detail of life-
lived, up to the hilt:
the embellishment of dreams
pulled from the ether
sound and sense in tow.

III

*I travelled North
in the seat opposite.
You didn't notice me
as you gazed
through your reflection,
sighting the past.*

*When you look at me
you rarely blink or
glance away (as people do).
Poor nature,
She hasn't a chance, has she?
Never a mote missed.*

*As my passenger
I shall care for your silence;
to let you loose on
unbidden thoughts
as they rise above
the scrolling hills.*

IV

Before your work
you sit, so still
as in a painting
by Hammershøi
(Isa's hair,
so like your own).

Beyond the desk,
the bay window
stretches your gaze
to the fox-frequented garden,
the hedged less-leaved beech,
the un-blossomed pear.

*Now, in the mind's eye,
your son, your daughter
bed-bound in a doorway:
(a tender moment witnessed)
then the silent grace,
the shared meal.*

V

Night falls
and done for the day
the violins unravel.
Only on a brittle guitar,
a Prelude:
Subtle Mysteries of Sleep.

As you close your eyes
tomorrow beckons (in a list),
and thinking backwards:
the nettle soup tale;
a birthday cake adventure;
breakfast on the patio with sunshine.

Premonitions? Perhaps.
But in yesterday's paper
a shock of poetry,
plants the seeds of blank verse -
no pointers given
(save these folded words).

VI

That evening
I asked the questions,
and later you said:
'If I'd not wanted to tell you
I wouldn't have'.
I'd already guessed. I knew.

out in the garden
a sunny day
skuddering clouds
white as the blossom
left and loose
leaving lightness

That evening,
as the minutes
ticked away,
I seemed at last
to see you entire,
even your quiet hands.

VII

As you fold
and crease your words
sheet upon sheet
a running commentary
flows,
ebbs and flows:

your present reading;
that playlist of songs
to sing in solitude;
reflections on 'proper' letters
and the lost art of spelling.
Such word-gifts . . .

. . . and you ask if I mind. . .
when what you tell me
fills those empty rooms
I put aside for you:
to live undisturbed
in my imagination house.

VIII

The end in sight,
the samples stitched,
book-bound.
Show me,
and turn the pages
in your silent way,

no comment required,
none given.
The day is closing.
Time parts: for a tired child,
a birthday meal,
and now your mother's smile.

Whilst at work in her kitchen
you thought-visit
my peninsula home,
pondering a duet
of music and sea-breathing silence,
distance everywhere.

IX

White and Yellow,
the final sheet,
a sign to stop.
With the care and formality
of closure the writing
ends, with just

your name.
How else could it be?
There's no other word
embossed on
these coloured pages
I pick up, I put down.

My fingers trace the braille
of your pen's indent.
the pressure and print
of letters formed.
Your very touch now
lies beneath my own.

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Origami Letters I

for Alice, always

Intimo ♩ = 60

Cello

mp

5

mf *mp*

9

mp *mp*

12

p *pp*

16

s.p. _____ ord. *mp* *pp* *mp*

20

p *pp*

23

p *mf* *p*

Origami Letters II

Movido e sostenuto ♩ = 110

26

30

30

p

34

ritardando

semplice ♩ = 55

Musical notation for the bass line of 'The Rose Tree'. The piece is in 3/4 time. The notation starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. This is followed by a half note G4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note E4. The melody then moves to a lower register, starting with a quarter note D4, followed by a quarter note C4, and a quarter note B3. This is followed by a half note A3, a quarter note G3, and a quarter note F#3. The melody ends with a quarter note E3, a quarter note D3, and a quarter note C3. The piece concludes with a final chord of G4, B4, and D5.

40

con primo ♩ = 110

[illegible]

45

ritardando

semplice e dolce ♩ = 55

45 *Marañao*

Bass clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), 2/4 time signature.

Measures 1-6:

- Measure 1: F#4 (quarter), G#4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter).
- Measure 2: C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G#4 (quarter).
- Measure 3: F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C#4 (quarter).
- Measure 4: B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G#3 (quarter), F#3 (quarter).
- Measure 5: E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C#3 (quarter), B2 (quarter).
- Measure 6: A2 (quarter), G#2 (quarter), F#2 (quarter), E2 (quarter).

Dynamics: *p* (piano) at the beginning, *f* (forte) at the end.

50

pizz.

arco

The first system of the musical score is written in bass clef. It begins with a 2/4 time signature and a *p* dynamic marking, with the instruction *sul tasto* below the staff. The first two measures contain quarter notes G2 and A2. The third measure is a whole rest, with a 5/8 time signature above it. The fourth measure is another whole rest, with a 3/4 time signature above it. The fifth measure contains a quarter note G2, with a *mp* dynamic marking below it. The sixth measure is a whole rest, with a 2/4 time signature above it. The seventh measure contains a quarter note A2, with a *p* dynamic marking below it. The eighth measure is a whole rest, with an *arco* instruction above it. The final measure contains a quarter note G2, with a *pp* dynamic marking below it. The system ends with a double bar line.

Origami Letters III

56 *guistamente e poco pesante* ♩ = 90

The first system of the musical score is written in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking. The melody consists of quarter notes G2, A2, and B2, followed by a half note C3. The accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line with quarter notes G2, A2, and B2, followed by a half note C3. The system concludes with a double bar line.

60

The first system of the musical score is written in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The melody consists of a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F2, and then a quarter note E2. A slur covers the next two measures: a half note D2 and a quarter note C2. The time signature changes to 6/8 for the next measure, which contains a half note B1. This is followed by a quarter note A1, a quarter note G1, and a quarter note F1, all beamed together. The time signature returns to 3/4 for the next measure, which contains a half note E1. The system concludes with a half note D1. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is placed below the final measure. The system is divided into two measures by a double bar line.

64

The first system of the musical score is written in bass clef with a 6/8 time signature. It begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The melody consists of a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, a quarter note Bb2, and a quarter note C3. A slur covers the next four notes: D3, E3, F3, and G3. The time signature changes to 3/4, and the key signature changes to one sharp (F#3). The melody continues with a half note G#3, a quarter note F#3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note D3. The system ends with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic marking.

68

The bass line of 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff in bass clef. It consists of four measures. The first measure is in 7/8 time and contains a half note G2, a quarter note A2, and an eighth note G2. The second measure is in 3/4 time and contains a half note G2 and a quarter note F2. The third measure is in 7/8 time and contains a half note G2, a quarter note A2, and an eighth note G2. The fourth measure is in 6/8 time and contains a half note G2 and a quarter note F2. The piece ends with a double bar line. A crescendo hairpin is placed below the staff, starting under the third measure and ending under the fourth measure, with the dynamic marking *p* (piano) at the end.

72

72

pizz. arco

pp *mp* *p*

77

The bass line is written on a single staff in bass clef. It begins with a double bar line, followed by a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, and a quarter rest. This is followed by a quarter note G2, a quarter note F2, and a quarter note E2. Then, there is a quarter note D2, a quarter note C2, and a quarter note B1. This is followed by a quarter note A1, a quarter note G1, and a quarter note F1. The line ends with a double bar line. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the staff. The time signature is 3/4.

82

86

86 *ritardando*

87 *mf*

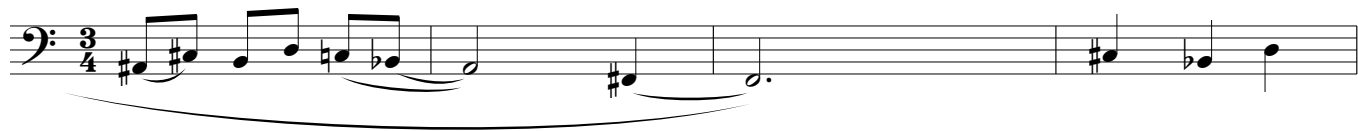
Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 86 and 87. Measure 86 is in 6/8 time and features a bass clef, a whole note chord of G2 and B2, and a half note G2. Measure 87 is in 3/4 time and features a bass clef, a whole note chord of G2 and B2, and a half note G2. The tempo marking 'ritardando' is placed above the staff. The dynamic marking 'mp' is placed below the staff. The dynamic marking 'mf' is placed below the staff.

Origami Letters IV

90 *innocente* ♩ = 65



93



97

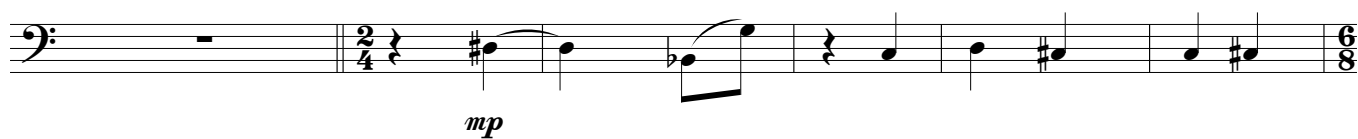
ritardando

dolce ♩ = 50



101

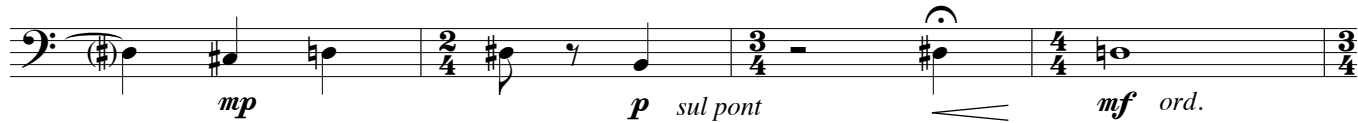
innocente ♩ = 65



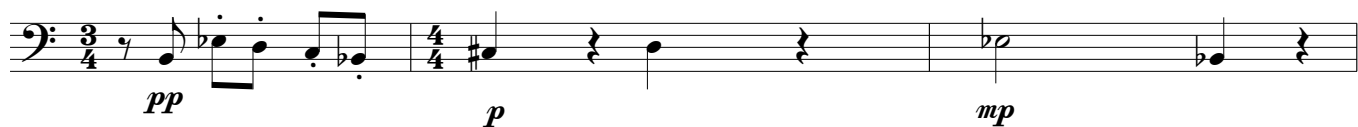
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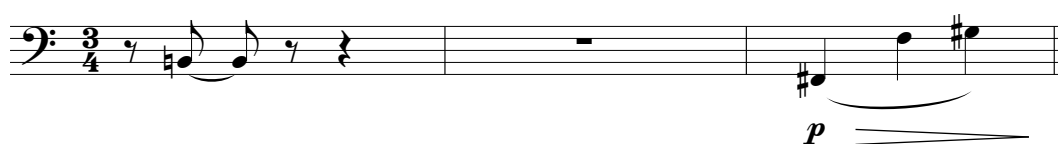
110



114 *dolciss.* = 55



117



Origami Letters V

120 *con diligenza* ♩ = 60

ppp *pp* *p* *mp*

126 *poco calando* *a tempo*

dim. *pp*

130 *pizz*

mp *risonare*

133 *arco* *calando* *a tempo*

p *p* *dim.* *mf*

137 *f* *f*

140 *mf*

142 *impetuoso* ♩ = 70 *pizz*

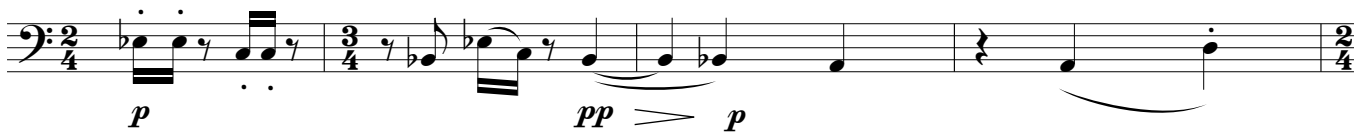
f *mf*

145 *ritardando* *arco*

p *p* *ppp* *p*

Origami Letters VI

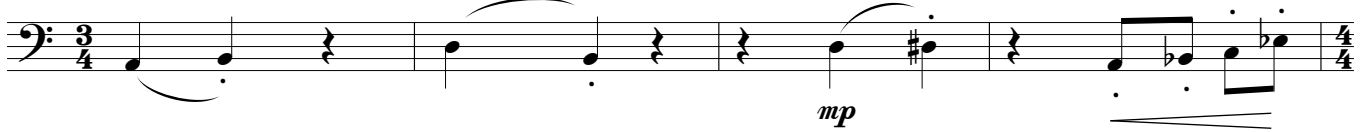
149 *indeciso e nervoso* ♩ = 60



153

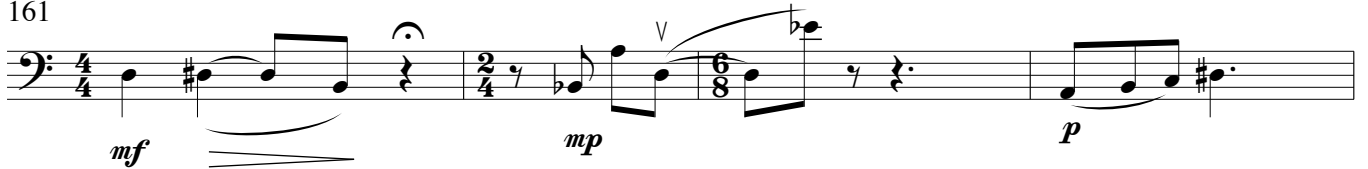


157



161

meno e dolce quasi pastorale ♩ = 55



165



169

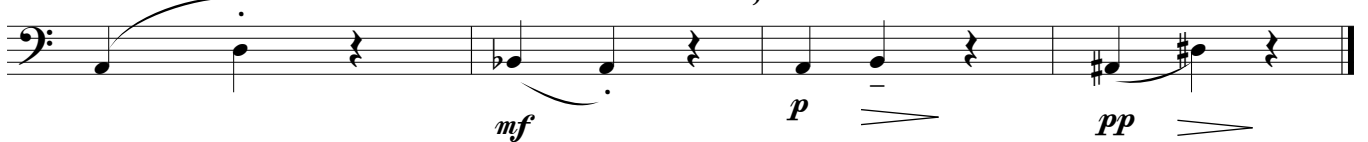


173 *indeciso e nervoso* ♩ = 60



177

, *ritardando*



Origami Letters VII

181 *intimissimo* = 70

185

189

192

The first system of the musical score is written in bass clef. It begins with a 6/8 time signature, followed by a key signature change to one sharp (F#). The melody consists of a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. This is followed by a 2/4 time signature change, with a quarter note D3. Then, there is a 6/8 time signature change, followed by a quarter note E3, a quarter note F#3, and a quarter note G3. This is followed by a 3/4 time signature change, with a quarter note A3, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note C4. The system ends with a 2/4 time signature change, with a quarter note D4. The dynamics are marked *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano).

196

Musical notation for the bass line of 'The Rose Tree'. The notation is on a single staff with a bass clef. It consists of four measures with changing time signatures: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 5/8. The notes are: Measure 1: quarter rest, eighth note G2, quarter note F2; Measure 2: quarter rest, eighth note G2, quarter note F2; Measure 3: quarter note G2, quarter note F2, quarter note E2; Measure 4: half note G2, quarter note F2, quarter note E2.

199

The musical score for the bass line of 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff. It begins with a bass clef and a 5/8 time signature. The first measure contains a half note G2 (marked with a sharp) and a quarter rest, with a forte (*mf*) dynamic marking below. The second measure contains a half note A2 (marked with a sharp) and a quarter note G2, with a mezzo-forte (*mp*) dynamic marking below. The third measure has a 7/8 time signature and contains a half note G2 (marked with a sharp), a quarter note F#2 (marked with a sharp), and an eighth note E2 (marked with a natural). The fourth measure contains a half note D2 (marked with a natural), a quarter note C2 (marked with a natural), and an eighth note B1 (marked with a natural). A crescendo hairpin is placed over the fourth measure. The fifth measure has a 3/4 time signature and contains a half note A1 (marked with a sharp) and a quarter note G1 (marked with a natural), with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking below. The sixth measure contains a half note F#1 (marked with a sharp) and a quarter note E1 (marked with a natural).

202

206

Musical notation for Example 6-10, showing a bass clef staff with notes G₂, A₂, B₂, C₃, D₃, E₃, F₃, and G₃. The notes are connected by a slur, and there is a fermata over the final G₃ note.

Origami Letters VIII

209 *espressivo*  = 90

213

213

218

218

Example 10-10

218

mp *p* *mf*

222

222

p *mp*

226

226

226

p flautando

mp

The musical score for the bassoon part, measures 226-229. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo/mood is marked 'flautando'. The dynamics are *p* (piano) for measures 226-227 and *mp* (mezzo-piano) for measures 228-229. The notation includes eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, with some measures containing rests.

230

230

mf ord.

mp

234

234

p *p* *mf*

238

238 *calando*

pp *senza sord.*

Origami Letters IX

240 *enfatico* $\text{♩} = 95$

mf

243

The musical score for the bass line of 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G2, a half note F2, and a quarter note E2. A 'V' mark is placed above the first measure. The next measure contains a quarter note D#2, a half note C2, and a quarter note B1. The tempo is marked 'p' (piano). The time signature changes to 5/8. The melody continues with a quarter note B1, a half note A1, and a quarter note G1. The tempo is marked 'sotto voce'. The time signature changes to 3/4. The melody ends with a quarter note F1, a half note E1, and a quarter note D1.

247 *ritardando* *innocente* ♩ = 75

The musical score for measures 247-250 is written on a single bass staff. Measure 247 is in 3/4 time and contains a half note G#3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3, all marked *mf* *ord.*. Measure 248 is in 3/4 time and contains a half note A3, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note C4, marked *f*. Measure 249 is in 3/4 time and contains a half note B3, a quarter note C4, and a quarter note D4, marked *mf* with a decrescendo hairpin. Measure 250 is in 7/8 time and contains a half note D4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note F4, marked *p*. The tempo marking *ritardando* is above the first measure, and the character marking *innocente* with a quarter note equal to 75 is above the fourth measure.

251

Example 10-10

254

7/8 3/4 4/4 7/8

257 *enfatico* ♩ = 95

mf

260

mp

mf poco pesante

264 *ritardando*

264 *pp* *p* *pp*

The musical score for measures 264-267 is written in bass clef. Measure 264 begins with a whole note G2 (one line below the staff) marked *pp*. A crescendo hairpin starts in measure 264 and ends in measure 265. Measure 265 contains a quarter note G2 marked *p*, followed by a quarter rest. Measure 266 contains a quarter note G2. A time signature change to 4/4 occurs at the start of measure 267. Measure 267 contains a half note G2 marked *pp*. A decrescendo hairpin starts in measure 267 and ends in measure 268. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 267.