



Origami Letters

*For Tenor Voice
and String Quartet*

*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

Tenor

Fold u - pon fold fold fold u - pon fold u - pon

Violin I *mp*

Violin II *mp*

Viola *mp*

Cello *mp*

5

T. fold your le - tters your o - ri - ga - mi le - tters map

Vn.I *mf* *mp*

Vn.II *mf* *mp*

Va. *mf* *mp*

Vc. *mf* *mp*

9

T. *thoughts i-ma - ges and mo - ments thoughts i - ma - ges and mo - ments of*

Vn.I *mp*

Vn.II *mp*

Va. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

12

T. *three days of two nights. Now to un -*

Vn.I *p* *pp*

Vn.II *p* *pp*

Va. *p* *pp*

Vc. *p* *pp*

16

T. *fold the creased tra - jec - to - ries in - ter - secting space fo llow ing time*

Vn.I *mp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mp* s.p. _____ ord. V

Vn.II *mp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mp* s.p. _____ ord. V

Va. *mp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mp* s.p. _____ ord. V

Vc. *mp* *mf* *mp* *pp* *mp* s.p. _____ ord. V

20

T. *each coloured sheet placed on this desk be comes a te - sse - lla - ted*

Vn.I *p* *pp* V

Vn.II *p* *pp* V

Va. *p* *pp* V

Vc. *p* *pp* V

T.  *dia - ry and grows be neath the hand.*

Vn.I  *p* *mf* *p*

Vn.II  *p* *mf* *p*

Va.  *p* *mf* *p*

Vc.  *p* *mf* *p*

Origami Letters II

movido e sostenuto ♩ = 110

26

Tenor

Ah, that's your se-cret: the power of the list; this, then

Violin I

p *mp*

Violin II

p *mp*

Viola

p *mp*

Cello

p *mp*

30

T.

this, then free-dom follows that's your se-cret: the power of the

Vn.I

p

Vn.II

p

Va.

p

Vc.

p

34

ritardando

semplce ♩ = 55

T. *list; this, then this, then free - - - - - dom fo llows. Peace-ful now, and*

Vn.I *mp pp p*

Vn.II *mp pp p*

Va. *mp pp p*

Vc. *mp pp p*

40

con primo ♩ = 110

T. *wa- tching the clouds cross the sky- light. How did you guess I love the de - tail*

Vn.I *mp mf*

Vn.II *mp mf*

Va. *mp mf*

Vc. *mp mf*

semplice e dolce ♩ = 55

45 *ritardando*

T. *of life lived of life lived up to the hilt the em*

Vn.I *f*

Vn.II *f*

Va. *f*

Vc. *f*

50

T. *- be-llish-ment of dreams pulled from the e-ther sound and sense in tow.*

Vn.I *p sul tasto mp p pp* pizz. arco

Vn.II *p sul tasto mp p pp* pizz. arco

Va. *p sul tasto mp p pp* pizz. arco

Vc. *p sul tasto mp p pp* pizz. arco

Origami Letters III

56 *guistamente e poco pesante* ♩ = 90

Tenor

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

60

T.

I tra-velled North in the seat o - ppo-site you did not no-tice me

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

64

T. *as you gazed as you gazed through your re-flec-tion.*

Vn.I *mp* *mf*

Vn.II *mp* *mf*

Va. *mp* *mf*

Vc. *mp* *mf*

68

T. *When you look at me*

Vn.I *f* *mf* *p*

Vn.II *f* *mf* *p*

Va. *p*

Vc. *p*

72

T. *you rare -ly blink or glance a - way as people do poor na - ture*

Vn.I *III*

Vn.II *IV III* *p*

Va. *pp mp p*

Vc. *pp mp p*

pizz. arco

77

T. *she hasn't a chance.*

Vn.I *mf f mp mf*

Vn.II *mf f mp mf*

Va. *mf mf*

Vc. *mf mf*

82

T. *I shall care for your si-lence to let you loose*

Vn.I *f mf > mp p*

Vn.II *f mf > mp p*

Va. *f mp p*

Vc. *f mp p*

86

ritardando

T. *on un-bi-dden thoughts as they rise a-bove the scro-lling hills.*

Vn.I *mp mf*

Vn.II *mp mf*

Va. *mp mf*

Vc. *mp mf*

Origami Letters IV

90 *innocente* ♩ = 65

Tenor

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

mp

93

T.

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

Be-fore your work you sit so

mp

97 *ritardando* *dolce* ♩ = 50

T. still, so still as in a pain - ting by Ha - mmer - shoi. I - sa's hair, so

Vn.I *p*

Vn.II *p*

Va. *p*

Vc. *p*

101 *innocente* ♩ = 65

T. like your own. Beyond the desk the

Vn.I *mp*

Vn.II *mp*

Va. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

107

T. *bay win-dow stre-tches your gaze to the fox fre - quen-ted gar-den,*

Vn.I *p cresc*

Vn.II *p cresc*

Va. *p cresc*

Vc. *p cresc*

110

T. *the hedge-less leaved beech, the un- blo-ssomed pear. Now, in your mind's eye*

Vn.I *mp p sul pont mf ord.*

Vn.II *mp p sul pont mf ord.*

Va. *mp p sul pont mf ord.*

Vc. *mp p sul pont mf ord.*

114 *dolciss.* ♩ = 55

T. *a tender mo-ment you son, your daugh-ter bed-bound in a door-way*

Vn.I *pp p mp*

Vn.II *pp p mp*

Va. *pp p mp*

Vc. *pp p mp*

117

T. *then, the si-lent grace, the shared meal.*

Vn.I *p*

Vn.II *p*

Va. *p*

Vc. *p*

Origami Letters V

120 *con diligenza* ♩ = 60

Tenor

Night falls, night falls and done for the day the vi - o - lins un

Violin I

ppp *pp* *p* *mp*

Violin II

ppp *pp* *p* *mp*

Viola

ppp *pp* *p* *mp*

Cello

ppp *pp* *p* *mp*

126 *poco calando* *a tempo*

T.

- ravel on - ly on a bri - ttle gui -

Vn.I

p

Vn.II

p

Va.

dim. *pp*

Vc.

dim. *pp*

130

T. *tar* *a pre-lude*

Vn.I *pizz* *mp* *risonare*

Vn.II *pizz* *mp* *risonare*

Va. *pizz* *mp* *risonare*

Vc. *pizz* *mp* *risonare*

133

T. *calando* *a tempo*
su-ble mys-ter-ies of sleep as you close your

Vn.I *p* *arco* *p* *dim.* *mp*

Vn.II *p* *arco* *p* *dim.* *mp*

Va. *p* *arco* *p* *dim.* *mp*

Vc. *p* *arco* *p* *dim.* *mf*

137

T. *eyes to-mor-row be-ckons and think-ing back-wards the ne-ttle soup tale,*

Vn.I *mf*

Vn.II *mf*

Va. *mf f*

Vc. *f f*

140

T. *a birth-day cake ad-ven-ture break-fast on a pa-ti-o with sun-shine.*

Vn.I *mp*

Vn.II *mp*

Va. *mf mp*

Vc. *mf*

142 *impetuoso* ♩ = 70

T. *Pre - mo - ni - tions? Per - haps, but in ye - ster day's pa - per a*

Vn.I *f* *mf* pizz

Vn.II *f* *mf* pizz

Va. *f* *mf* pizz

Vc. *f* *mf* pizz

145 *ritardando*

T. *shock of po - e - try plants the seeds of blank verse.*

Vn.I *p* *pp* *p* *ppp* *p* arco

Vn.II *p* *pp* *p* *ppp* *p* arco

Va. *p* *p* *ppp* *p* arco

Vc. *p* *p* *ppp* *p* arco

Origami Letters VI

149 *indeciso e nervoso* ♩ = 60

Tenor

That eve-ning I asked the ques- tions

Violin I

p *pp* > *p*

Violin II

p *pp* > *p*

Viola

p *pp* > *p*

Cello

p *pp* > *p*

153

Tenor

that eve-ning I asked the ques- tions

Vn.I

pp > *p*

Vn.II

pp > *p*

Va.

pp > *p*

Vc.

pp > *p*

157

Tenor *and la - ter la - ter you said if I'd not not wan-ted to tell you*

Vn.I *mp*

Vn.II *mp*

Va. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

161

Tenor *I would-n't have out in the gar-den out in the gar-den a su-nny day*

meno e dolce quasi pastorale ♩ = 55

Vn.I *mf mp p*

Vn.II *mf mp p*

Va. *mf mp p*

Vc. *mf mp p*

165

Tenor *a su-nny day sku-dder-ing clouds white, white as the*

Vn.I *pp s.p.----- ord. p*

Vn.II *pp s.p.----- ord. p*

Va. *pp s.p.----- ord. p*

Vc. *pp s.p.----- ord. p*

169

Tenor *blo-ssom left and loose left and loose blo-ssom lea-ving light-ness*

Vn.I *pp*

Vn.II *pp*

Va. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

173 *indeciso e nervoso* ♩ = 60

Tenor

as the mi-nutes ticked a way that eve-ning. I seemed at last

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

177

Tenor

ritardando
I seemed at last to see you en - tire e - ven your quiet hands.

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

Origami Letters VII

181 *intimissimo* ♩ = 70

Tenor

As you fold crease and fold your words sheet u-pon sheet u-pon

Violin I *mp*

Violin II *mp*

Viola *mp*

Cello *mp*

185

T. sheet a ru- nning co-mmen - ta - ry flows ebbs and

Vn.I *mf*

Vn.II *mf*

Va. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

189

T. *flows ebbs and flows your pre-sent rea-ding:*

Vn.I *mp p mp*

Vn.II *mp p mp*

Va. *mp p mp*

Vc. *mp p mp*

192

T. *that play-list of songs to sing in so-li-tude; re-flec-tions on*

Vn.I *p mp*

Vn.II *p mp*

Va. *p mp*

Vc. *p mp*

196

T. *'pro-per' le-tters and the lost art of spe-lling. Such word gifts*

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

199

T. *and you ask if I mind when what you tell me*

Vn.I *mf mp p*

Vn.II *mf mp p*

Va. *mf mp p*

Vc. *mf mp p*

202

ritardando

T. *fills* *those emp -ty rooms I put a-side for you to live*

Vn.I *pp p mp p*

Vn.II *pp p mp p*

Va. *pp p mp p*

Vc. *pp p mp p*

206

T. *un -dis-turbed in my i - ma -gi - nation house.*

Vn.I *pp*

Vn.II *pp*

Va. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Origami Letters VIII

209 *espressivo* ♩ = 90

Tenor

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

The end in sight the sa-mples stitched

p con sord *mp*

213

T.

Vn. I

Vn. II

Va.

Vc.

book bound. Show me, and turn the pa-ges in your si-lent way,

pp *p*

218

T. *no co - mmentre - quired, none gi - ven.*

Vn.I *mp p mf*

Vn.II *mp p mf*

Va. *mp p mf*

Vc. *mp p mf*

222

T. *The day is clo - sing.*

Vn.I *mp*

Vn.II *mp*

Va. *p mp*

Vc. *p mp*

T. *Time parts: for a tired child, a birth-day meal, and now your mother's*

Vn.I *P flautando mp*

Vn.II *P flautando mp*

Va. *P flautando mp*

Vc. *P flautando mp*

T. *smile. Whilst at work in her kitchen you thought vi - sit my pen - in - su - la*

Vn.I *mf ord. mp*

Vn.II *mf ord. mp*

Va. *mf ord. mp*

Vc. *mf ord. mp*

234

T. home, pon-der-ing a du-et of mu-sic and sea brea-thing si-lence,

Vn.I *p* *p* *mf*

Vn.II *p* *p* *mf*

Va. *p* *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *p* *mf*

238 *calando*

T. dis-tance e-very-where.

Vn.I *pp* *senza sord.*

Vn.II *pp* *senza sord.*

Va. *pp* *senza sord.*

Vc. *pp* *senza sord.*

Origami Letters IX

240 *enfatico* ♩ = 95

Tenor

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

mf

mf

mf

mf

White and ye-llow,

T.

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

p

p

p

p

the fi-nal sheet, a sign to stop. With care and for - mal-i-ty of clo-sure

sotto voce

sotto voce

sotto voce

sotto voce

247 *ritardando* *innocente* ♩ = 75

T. *the wri - ting ends, with just your name. How else could it*

Vn.I *mf ord. f mf p*

Vn.II *mf ord. f mf p*

Va. *mf ord. f mf p*

Vc. *mf ord. f mf p*

251

T. *be? How else could it be? There's no o - ther word, no o - ther word em -*

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

254

T. *bossed on these co-loursed pa - ges I pick up, I put down. How*

Vn.I

Vn.II

Va.

Vc.

257

, *enfatico* ♩ = 95

T. *else could it be? , My*

Vn.I *mf*

Vn.II *mf*

Va. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

260

T. *fin-gers trace the braille of your pen's in-tent the pre-ssure and print of le-tters formed.*

Vn.I *mp* *mf poco pesante*

Vn.II *mp* *mf poco pesante*

Va. *mp* *mf poco pesante*

Vc. *mp* *mf poco pesante*

264 *ritardando*

T. *Your ve - ry touch now lies be - neath my own.*

Vn.I *pp* *p* *leggiero* *pp*

Vn.II *pp* *p* *leggiero* *pp*

Va. *pp* *p* *leggiero* *pp*

Vc. *pp* *p* *leggiero* *pp*