

Songs to the Fair Youth:  
6 Songs on Fluidity

for countertenor, alto saxophone, and piano  
Op. 20

dedicated to Chay Chui  
commissioned by Ensemble Fioritura

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**Lance Mok**

Text by William Shakespeare  
London: April 2025

ca. 26 mins

1. Sonnet 108	1
2. Sonnet 121	7
3. Romance	14
4. Sonnet 40	18
5. Sonnet 41	26
6. Sonnet 42	32
7. Metamorphosis	39
8. Sonnet 20	44

*Songs to the Fair Youth: 6 Songs on Fluidity* is part of the composer's ongoing project to set the complete sonnets of William Shakespeare into song cycles. Each cycle in the project shares a common lexicon of leitmotifs, and every cycle based on the 'Fair Youth' sonnets features an obbligato instrument. This particular one highlights the alto saxophone.

This work brings together six of Shakespeare's sonnets that most vividly reveal the poet's fluid approach to desire, interrogating the perceived binaries of love, sex, and gender. The cycle opens with the hymn-like reverence of Sonnet 108, which declares timeless love to the Fair Youth, only to be sharply contrasted by the operatic defiance of Sonnet 121. Here, the speaker boldly confronts public judgment and asserts the right to live and love freely. Following a Schumann-esque Romance, the love-triangle sequence lies at the heart of the cycle, where the boundaries between sexuality, desire, friendship, and rivalry blur, as the poet, the Fair Youth, and the Dark Lady become tangled in a complex web of affection and betrayal. Ambiguity shifts to gender in *Metamorphosis*, which traces a journey of self-identification and transformation. As the saxophone line cycles through many incarnations of the same motif, it gradually gains confidence through a process of perplexity and pain — a transformation that resonates deeply with the queer experience. Sonnet 20 brings the cycle to a close with a tender exploration of gender fluidity and attraction, with its inherent ambiguity mirrored in the aleatoric elements of the music.

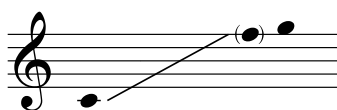
The two instrumental movements can also be performed as a separate work under the title *Romance and Metamorphosis*, Op. 20a.

The song cycle was commissioned by Ensemble Fioritura with funding from Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants for the project *Silhouettes of Passion's Master-mistress*, and was premiered by countertenor Keith Pun and the Ensemble at Conway Hall, London, United Kingdom, on 16 May 2025.

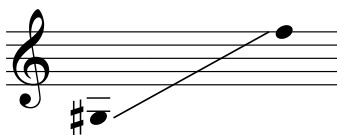
Instrumentation: countertenor, alto saxophone, and piano

The voice part is sung in English. The respective range of each song is as follows:

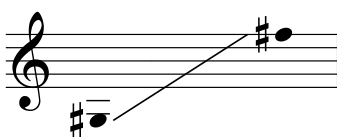
1. Sonnet 108



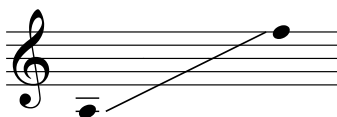
2. Sonnet 121



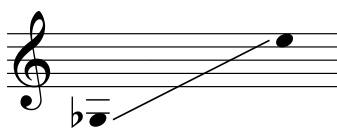
4. Sonnet 40



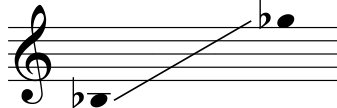
5. Sonnet 41



6. Sonnet 42



8. Sonnet 20



Text

Sonnets by William Shakespeare

108

What's in the brain that ink may character  
Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit?  
What's new to speak, what now to register,  
That may express my love, or thy dear merit?  
Nothing, sweet boy; but yet like prayers divine  
I must each day say o'er the very same,  
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,  
Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.  
So that eternal love in love's fresh case  
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,  
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,  
But makes antiquity for aye his page,  
    Finding the first conceit of love there bred  
    Where time and outward form would show it dead.

121

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed  
When not to be receives reproach of being,  
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed  
Not by our feeling but by others' seeing.  
For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,  
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?  
No, I am that I am, and they that level  
At my abuses reckon up their own;  
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel,  
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown  
    Unless this general evil they maintain:  
    All men are bad, and in their badness reign.

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all:  
 What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?  
 No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call:  
 All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more.  
 Then if for my love, thou my love receivest,  
 I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest;  
 But yet be blamed, if thou this self deceivest  
 By wilful taste of what thyself refusest.  
 I do forgive thy robb'ry, gentle thief,  
 Although thou steal thee all my poverty;  
 And yet love knows it is a greater grief  
 To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.  
     Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,  
     Kill me with spites, yet we must not be foes.

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits  
 When I am sometime absent from thy heart  
 Thy beauty, and thy years full well befits,  
 For still temptation follows where thou art.  
 Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won;  
 Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed.  
 And when a woman woos, what woman's son  
 Will sourly leave her till he have prevailed?  
 Ay me, but yet thou mightst my seat forbear,  
 And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth  
 Who lead thee in their riot even there  
 Where thou art forced to break a twofold troth:  
     Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee;  
     Thine, by thy beauty being false to me.

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,  
 And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;  
 That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,  
 A loss in love that touches me more nearly.  
 Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye,  
 Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her,  
 And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,  
 Suff'ring my friend for my sake to approve her.  
 If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,  
 And losing her, my friend hath found that loss:  
 Both find each other, and I lose both twain,  
 And both for my sake lay on me this cross.  
     But here's the joy: my friend and I are one.  
     Sweet flattery—then she loves but me alone.

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted  
 Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;  
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
 With shifting change as is false women's fashion;  
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,  
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;  
 A man in hue, all *hues* in his controlling,  
 Which steals men's eyes, and women's souls amazeth.  
 And for a woman wert thou first created,  
 Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,  
 And by addition me of thee defeated,  
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.  
     But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,  
     Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

Performance Instructions:

Accidentals in unmeasured sections apply only to the note they immediately precede. A courtesy ♯ is also given wherever a cancellation of an accidental would have been required in conventional notation.



Score in C

dedicated to Chay Chui

致 崔子皓

# Songs to the Fair Youth: 6 Songs on Fluidity

Op. 20

commissioned by Ensemble Fioritura

Lance Mok

Text by William Shakespeare

## I. Sonnet 108

Moderato, molto liberamente quasi un'improvvisazione ♩ = 96

*p* molto rubato

CounterTENor

Alto Saxophone

Piano

Ped.

What's in the

4

3

brain that ink may char - ac - ter

Ped.

48 **6** *f*

Nor gives to nec - - es - sar - y wrin - kles

*poco* *mp*

**6** *cresc.* *f*

51

place, \_\_\_\_\_ But makes an - ti - qui - ty for \_\_\_\_\_ aye his

*f* *mp*

*mp* *poco*

55 **7** *dim. poco a poco*

page, \_\_\_\_\_ Find - ing the first con - ceit of love \_\_\_\_\_ there bred Where

*pp* *p*

**7** *mp* *p*

6 Songs on Fluidity

## 2. Sonnet 121

**Allegro agitato** ♩ = 116

Countertenor

*f* *poco* *f*

'Tis bet - ter to be vile than vile es - teemed When not to be re - ceives

Alto Saxophone

Piano

**Allegro agitato** ♩ = 116

4

re - proach of be - ing, And the just

*f* *ff*

25 **4**

*f*

No, I am

*f* *mp* 5:4

**4**

*f* 8 *Ped.*

27 *ff*

that I am, No,

*f*

29

I am that I am, and

*mp* *f* 5:4

## 3. Romance

Allegro appassionato ♩. = 126

Alto Saxophone

Allegro appassionato ♩. = 126

Piano

*mp* poco*mf* poco

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

3

Measures 3-5. Saxophone rests. Piano plays a descending eighth-note scale. Dynamics: *f* (measure 3), *dim.* (measure 5). Pedal points are indicated at the end of measures 3 and 4.

6

Measures 6-8. Saxophone plays a quarter note. Piano plays a descending eighth-note scale. Dynamics: *mp* poco (measure 6), *mf* poco (measure 7), *mp* (measure 8). Pedal points are indicated at the end of measures 6 and 7.

9

Measures 9-11. Saxophone plays a quarter note. Piano plays a descending eighth-note scale. Dynamics: *f* (measure 9), *mp* (measure 10), *f* (measure 11). Pedal points are indicated at the end of measures 9 and 10.

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

6 Songs on Fluidity

4. Sonnet 40

Con disperazione ♩ = 92

molto accel.

a tempo

*ff*

Countertenor



Take \_\_\_\_\_

Alto Saxophone



tr~~~~~

Con disperazione ♩ = 92

molto accel.

a tempo

*f*

Piano



Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

*mp*

3

*dim.*

all my loves,

Take all my loves,

my love,

*ff*

*dim.*

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

31 **3** *mf*

But yet be blamed, if thou this self de -

**3** *mf* *p* *mf*

34

- ceiv - est By wil - ful taste of what thy - self re - fus -

*p*

37 **4** *p* *mf*

- est. I do for -

*pp* *mp poco*

**4** *mf* Ped. Ped.

6 Songs on Fluidity

5. Sonnet 41

Malinconico ma poco scherzando ♩. = 60

Countertenor

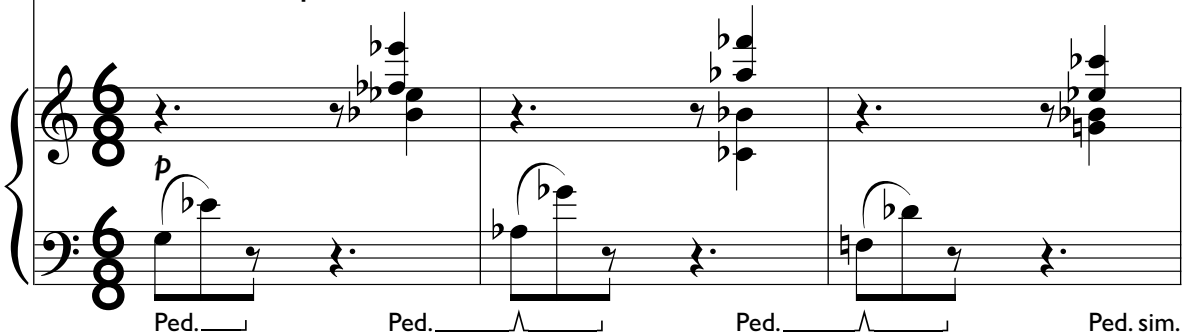


Alto Saxophone



Malinconico ma poco scherzando ♩. = 60

Piano



4

*mp leggiero*



Those pret - ty wrongs that li - ber - ty com -





17 **2** *mp dolce*

Gen - tle thou art, \_\_\_\_\_ and there - fore to be

**2** *pp*

22 *rit.*

won; \_\_\_\_\_ Beau - teous thou art, \_\_\_\_\_ there - fore to be as -

*p* *rit.*

26 **3** *Meno mosso* ♩. = 34

- sailed. \_\_\_\_\_ And when a wo-man woos, what wo - man's son Will sour - ly leave her

*mp* **3** *Meno mosso* ♩. = 34

# 6. Sonnet 42

Andantino doloroso ♩ = 92

Countertenor

Alto Saxophone

Piano

*pp*

*p express.*

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

4

(Ped.) \_\_\_\_\_

7

*poco*

*p*

*mp*

That thou hast

(Ped.) \_\_\_\_\_

55 **allarg. grottesco**

friend and I are one. Sweet

*mf* *p*

**allarg.**

59 **7 a tempo**

flat - - ter-y then she loves but me a -

*mf* *mp* *f*

**7 a tempo**

*f*

63 **Presto ♩ = 180 molto accel. e stretto**

- lone.

*f* *tr* *ff*

**Presto ♩ = 180 molto accel. e stretto**

*ff*

# 7. Metamorphosis

Alto Saxophone

Piano

Tentatively

*pp*

Tentatively

*pp*

Ped.

[1]

Ped. sim.

[1]

[1]

*pp*

(Ped.)

Ped.

The musical score for '7. Metamorphosis' is written for Alto Saxophone and Piano. It consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the Alto Saxophone part with a 'Tentatively' marking and a dynamic of *pp*, and the Piano part with a 'Tentatively' marking and a dynamic of *pp*. The second system includes a 'Ped. sim.' marking. The third system features a 'p' dynamic marking and a 'Ped.' marking. The fourth system includes a '(Ped.)' marking and a 'Ped.' marking. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass staves, clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

allarg.

5

Appassionato ♩ = 100

allarg.

5

Appassionato ♩ = 100

56

56

allarg.

5

Appassionato ♩ = 100

ff

allarg.

5

Appassionato ♩ = 100

ff

60

60

mf

dim.

65

65

p

ff

rit.

mf

p

f

rit.

dim.

70

6

Più tranquillo ♩ = 88

6

Più tranquillo ♩ = 88

70

p

6

Più tranquillo ♩ = 88

Ped.

Ped.

## 8. Sonnet 20

**Lento, molto tranquillo**

Countertenor

Alto Saxophone

Piano

*pp*

5"

*p sempre semplice*

A. \_\_\_\_\_

Select a random pitch below at any octave displacement and hold for 5". Adjacent pitch classes must form an interval  $\geq$  a minor 3rd (compound or simple). Repeat the process until otherwise specified.

**Lento, molto tranquillo**

6

[1]

(2nd D♭)

(3rd D♭)

♩. = 44

*p legato e sempre semplice*

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

42 6

by \_\_\_\_\_ ad - di - tion me of thee de - feat - ed, By \_\_\_\_\_ add - ing one

♩. = 44

(Ped.)

46 6

thing to \_\_\_\_\_ my pur - pose noth - ing.

*f* *p*

♩. = 44

*mf* *pp*

*f* *p* *pp*

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_ Ped. \_\_\_\_\_