

**6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip**  
for medium voice, flute, tenor saxophone, and piano  
**Op. 21**

commissioned by Ensemble Fioritura

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**Lance Mok**

Text by Eric Yip  
London: April 2025

ca. 21 1/2 mins



1. 不 / No	1
2. 裂 / Tear	12
3. 暑 / Summer	22
4. 譯 / Translate	33
5. 曲 / Song	44
6. 畫 / Painting	54

The sonnet is unique as a poetic form in that it is driven by transformation. The volta, or turn, is traditionally included in the second-half of a sonnet, and it is where the poem must enact a moment of change. These six poems are, in their own way, sonnets based on Chinese characters. They all contain voltas, but they themselves are also moments of change. The poems vary in their aspects and are ultimately not bound to the particularities of what we would consider queer subject matter. What they do have in common, however, is a preoccupation with strangeness, deniability, and the unease and thrill of moving between places, languages, and bodies.

The first sonnet of the sequence, *<不 / No>*, begins in a state of negation. Queerness, as uncategorisable as it is, is perhaps easiest to define by what it is not: not normative, not confinable, not static. When we describe a thing as odd, we are saying that thing does not align with the grain of the world. With oddity also comes hesitation and denial, and as the speaker or speakers move through these sonnets, they often find themselves moving against that well-defined grain. That moment of strange friction is where change is catalysed and made concrete. It is where we locate the in-between space in which we exist, the gap between what should be and isn't, the 'nothing that holds what we want'.

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.

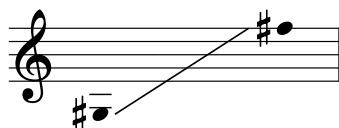
Programme notes by Eric Yip

Instrumentation: medium voice, flute, tenor saxophone, and piano

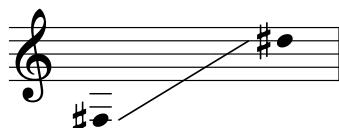
The voice part is mostly sung in English, with Chinese characters sung in Cantonese.

The respective range of each song is as follows:

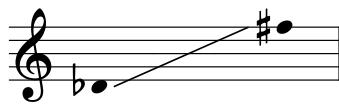
1. 不 / No



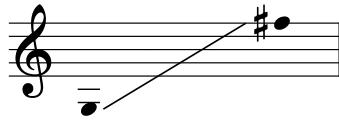
2. 裂 / Tear



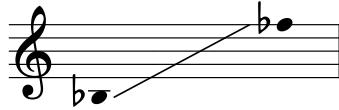
3. 暑 / Summer



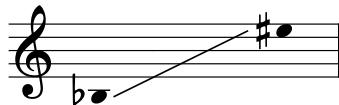
4. 譯 / Translate



5. 曲 / Song



6. 畫 / Painting



## Text

Sonnets by Eric Yip

不 / No

How the word stands like an inverted tree,  
a refusal to obey the laws that birthed it.  
Or is it a proper tree 木 with its top  
chopped off? All that life wondering  
if my brain's inverted, improper, asterisked  
with defects. Be honest, straight 直  
or bent 扱? Bent like a branch or straight  
like a trunk? Like a man? You like men?  
Ma said don't stand slanted 歪 like a girl.  
歪 like 不正. Not proper. A man's spine  
should be trunk-strong. Once, after a fight,  
she sat me down with a cup of fig soup.  
Tell me you're not like those defective men.  
I looked her straight in the eye and said no.

裂 / Tear

On a bench in the laundromat, I see him  
slumped, sobbing, his back reflected  
  
in the washer's porthole. Inside the machine,  
a deep, irregular whirr, the metal drum  
  
tossing loose socks, shirts, invisible limbs.  
Never have I seen a man break  
  
so completely, as if a vast crevasse  
had unzipped his life. Later, hauling  
  
a warm bag of clothes up uneven flights,  
I recall my father's woolly voice,  
  
our last meal together, the ceiling fan  
chopping light above us, when he asked  
  
if I would ever forgive him, how slowly  
he took off his glasses and wept.

暑 / Summer

Days were thirty-eight degrees,  
our bodies just under. I dreamt of winter  
while you ran your soul into ovals.  
You said running doesn't feed wallets;  
I agreed. The appeal of piety grew apparent.  
Moths applied themselves to gloating windows.  
On the same railing our shirts touched.

When I told you I was leaving  
I expected scorn. We walked to the shore  
where silhouettes were fishing. Spume  
encroached on our toes, obscenely cold.  
And the waves pleating, repeating  
like habit without thought, wading  
all this way to our feet to be lost.

譯 / Translate

*Traduttore, traditore*

—*Italian proverb*

If asked to explain 人情味, I'd point to  
No one knows *placeholder* in Cantonese.  
*this joke is untranslatable, please laugh*  
behind this one. In another language  
relaxes his scowl. *How is your grandmother?*  
嫲嫲, 婆婆—one dead, the other waiting.  
sometimes I think you don't know

the last cart noodle shop in Kowloon City.  
At a party, I am Jimmy Carter's interpreter:  
to save face. There is a sentence stranded  
my tongue dissolves. The customs officer  
How I split *grandmother* in two:  
A life lost in the saying. Dear reader,  
what I mean, if you know what I mean.

## 曲 / Song

The closeted singer sings of heartbreak  
as variegated houses trace the track  
towards a train-bound town  
indifferent to description.

He is like me, except prettier,  
with fans who gift him roses  
and forearms inked in his name.

I picture him relinquished of duty  
in blank hinterlands.  
Just another clueless tourist.

I'm tired of artifice.

What I need now is purpose  
in my voice, the way stones sound  
like stones, thorns like thorns.

## 畫 / Painting

Night had drained all paint from the room.  
As it were, the clock shaving seconds  
in the dark where time drags itself out  
like swans on dull water. By the bed,  
our pile of implements: blindfolds,  
briefs, a vial of liniment. Hours ago  
you made me a new kind of canvas  
and now my whole self thrums with a soreness  
even turpentine can't cure. For years  
I thought a blank canvas symbolised nothing,  
but it is only nothing that holds  
what we want, the way eyes close  
so snow can fall peerlessly in the country  
of sleep, where we grow old together.

Score in C

# 6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip

Op. 21  
commissioned by Ensemble Fioritura

Lance Mok  
Text by Eric Yip

## I. 不 / No

**Lento**  $\text{♩} = 63$

Voice

Flute

Tenor Saxophone

Piano

**Lento**  $\text{♩} = 63$

15/4

*f* *mp liberamente*

*mp giusto*

*con Ped.*

3

Fl.

Tsax.

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

3/4

4/4

9/4

22

stretto

- vert ed, im - prop - er, as - ter - isked with

Fl.

Tsax.

stretto

de - - fects. Be hon - est,

25

4 Agitato  $\text{♩} = 92$

de - - fects. Be hon - est,

Fl.

Tsax.

4 Agitato  $\text{♩} = 92$

4 Agitato  $\text{♩} = 92$

## 6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip

## 2. 裂 / Tear

**Con moto**  $\text{♩} = 120$

Voice

Flute

Flute *pp* *sempre*

Tenor Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone *pp* *sempre*

**Con moto**  $\text{♩} = 120$

Piano

3 *p*

On a bench in the

Fl.

Tsax.

Piano

29 *mp* *rit.*

Fl. *dim.*

Tsax. *3*

Fl. *rit.* *3* *3*

Tsax. *dim.* *3*

32 *p*

Fl. *p*

Tsax.

Fl. *3*

Tsax. *3* *pp*

Fl. *3*

Tsax. *3*

37 **4** **Meno mosso**  $\text{♩} = 80$

Fl. *p*

Tsax. *p*

Fl. *3* *3*

Tsax. *Lat - er, haul - ing a warm bag of*

Fl. *3*

Tsax. *mf mechanically*

## 6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip

### 3. 暑 / Summer

**Adagio** ♩ = 63

3

*p* *mf*

Days were thir - ty - eight de - grees, our

Fl.

Tsax.

*mf* *p*

8

34

Fl.

Tsax.

3

3

36

Fl.

Tsax.

mp

p

p

## 6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip

## 4. 譯 / Translate

**Vivo  $\text{♩} = 168$**

Voice

Flute

Tenor Saxophone

Piano

5 **I** **mp**

If asked to ex - - plain

Fl.

Tsax.

**I**

rit.

**Meno mosso, ma burlesco**  $\text{♩} = 112$

34

*p* *mf*

At a par - ty, I am Jim - my Car - ter's in -

Fl.

*pp*

Tsax.

rit.

**Meno mosso, ma burlesco**  $\text{♩} = 112$

*pp* *mp*

Ped. — Ped. — Ped. —

38

*poco* **5** *f*

- ter - pret - er: this joke is un - trans - lat - a - ble, please

Fl.

*mf* **5** *mf* *p*

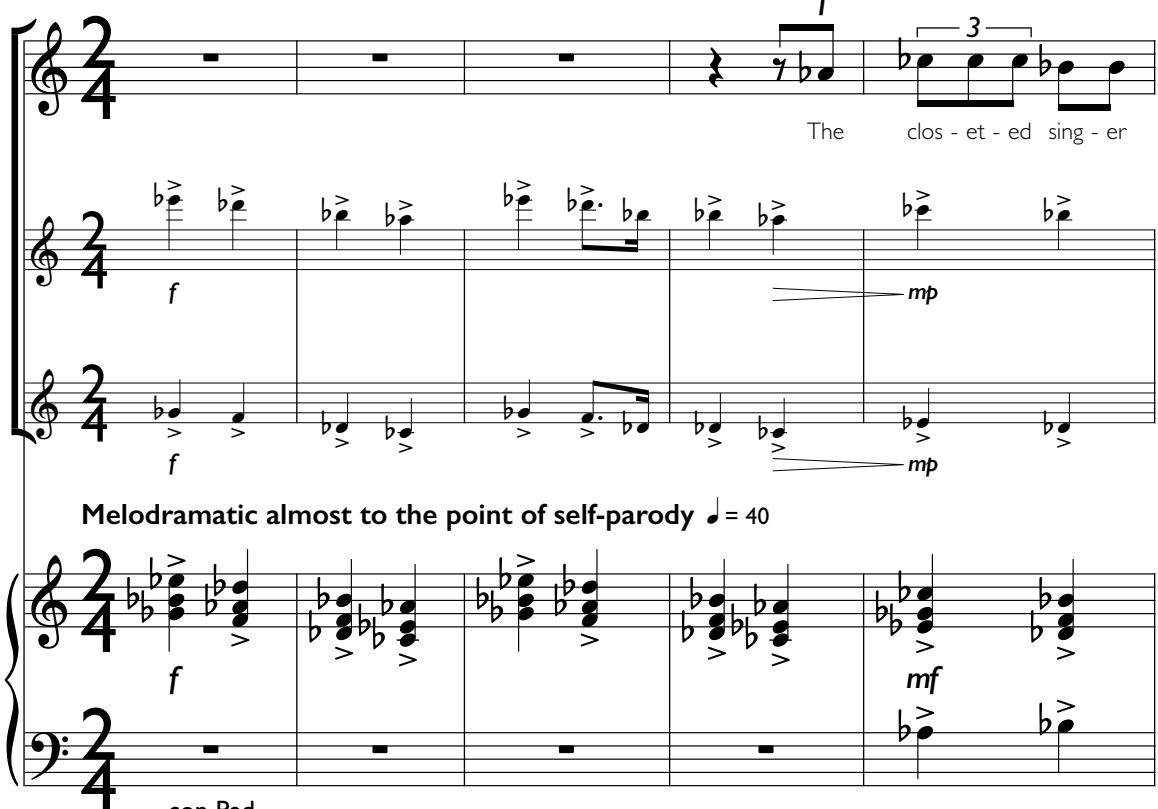
Tsax.

*mf* **5** *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Ped. — Ped. — Ped. — Ped. —

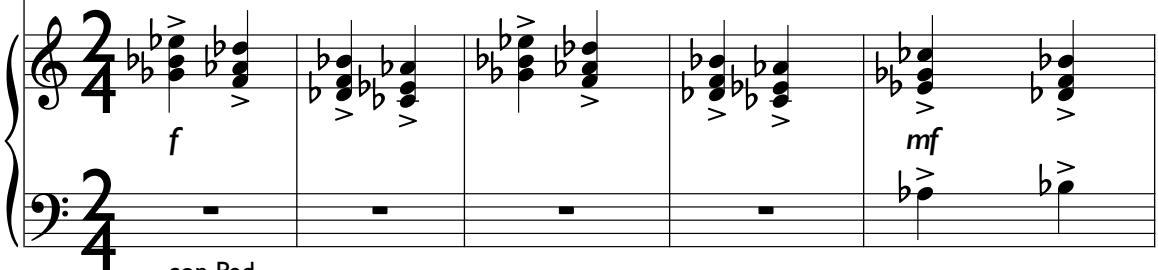
## 5. 曲 / Song

Melodramatic almost to the point of self-parody  $\text{♩} = 40$ 

Voice 

Flute 

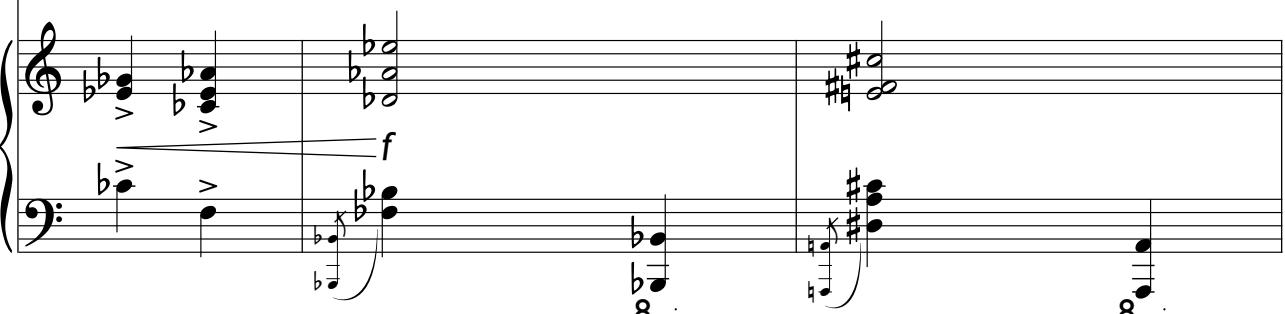
Tenor Saxophone 

Piano 

6 

Fl. 

Tsax. 



49 **5** *mp* *cresc.*

What I need now is pur - pose in my

Fl. *p* *cresc.*

Tsax. *p* *cresc.*

**5**

*p* *b9* *cresc.* *#9*

*p* *b9* *#9* *#9*

54 *f*

voice,

Fl. *f* *poco*

Tsax. *f* *poco*

*f* *3* *3* *3*

*f* *3* *3* *3*

*f* *3* *3* *3*

## 6 Character Sonnets by Eric Yip

## 6. 畵 / Painting

Largo e molto tranquillo  $\text{♩} = 34$ 

Voice

Flute

Flute *pp sempre*

Tenor Saxophone

Tenor Saxophone *pp sempre*

Piano

Piano Ped.

5

Fl.

Tsax.

Piano *p* (Ped.)

Musical score for Flute (Fl.) and Bassoon (Tsax.) in 44 time. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) features the Flute and Bassoon. The Flute has a sustained note with a grace note, followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The Bassoon has a sustained note with a grace note, followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The second system (measures 5-8) features the Bassoon. The Bassoon has a sustained note with a grace note, followed by a sixteenth-note pattern. The score is dynamic **ff**. Measure numbers 5 are indicated in boxes above the staves.

46

and now my whole self

Fl.

Tsax.

(Ped.)