

Writing a melody representing the emotions and flow of Emily Dickinson's poem was a difficult challenge. There were a myriad of factors that went in to writing even such a simple melody. Some challenges included, finding the right starting tone, the pacing of the poem, and how to represent the moment of death. The music, through the use of rhythmic contrast, melodic contour, and the use of accidentals help to shape the melody to embody the writings of Dickinson.

The text of Emily Dickinson represents the coming of death and the blissful experience that she expects to come from her eventual passing. In the first few stanzas of the poem Dickinson depicts the sensation leading up to death as a calm and friendly experience describing Death's actions in the second line with, "He kindly stopped for me –." This act of courtesy by Death creates warmth and security for the character. What is eventually realized, in the last stanza, is the reality that dying presents to the soul and body. Dickinson describes the moment of passing in the line, " We passed the Setting Sun – Or rather – He passed us..." this exact moment the true feelings of death are presented and the blissfully naïve warmth of Death is no more than a final comfort before an altering experience.

The melodic line composed follows the poem's arc and its mood beginning with a blissful start and ending with an excited passage to signify the moment of death. The difficulty of the beginning of the melody was how to convey the proper initial tone to represent the poem. The opening lines are slow and stagnant and build up the initial mystery upon meeting Death. There is a mild sense of foreboding in the opening three lines to the melody, which is represented by the low A3's. The melodic contour created by approaching the low dominant note in the D major scale further exhibits the mystery surrounding Death. The ascending line beginning with the tonic D4 ascending to the dominant A4 on the third beat of the second bar represents the

realization that Death is actually not a character to be feared. Instead the joyful melody represents the comfort that Death brings onto Dickinson's character and establishes the tone of the melody throughout the musical passage.

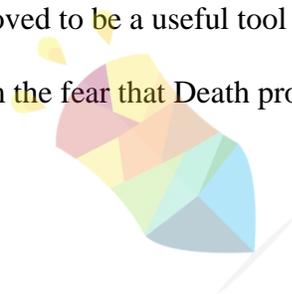
The opening rhythms also indicate the uncertainty of the opening lines in the poem. The melody begins with half notes and quarter notes creating pause between each differentiating duration. The repeating D's and E's in bars 1 and 3, respectively, help to convey the mystery of Death by creating a sense of timidity and hesitation between the successions of quarter notes in measure 2. With this rhythmic syncopation of stop and go, the melody properly introduces the initial uncertainty of Death's presence.

Another challenge faced with the composition of this melody was how to represent the increasing pace of the poem at the start of the third stanza. Dickinson increases the pacing through repetition of the phrase, "We passed." The successive use of this phrase increases the rate in which Dickinson's character is experiencing, "Fields of Grazing Grass," and the, "Setting Sun." To represent this in the melody, the rhythmic rate of the melody was also increased. Contrary to the initial three lines of the music, the second half of the melody utilizes a long stream and series of eighth notes in order to match Dickinson's pace in her poem. The constant flow of eighth notes in the latter half of the melody also was useful in conveying this stream of consciousness as it felt like the poem was also simply listing experiences in the third stanza. This stark contrast between the two major phrases in the melody.

The ending was especially tricky given the unsettling nature of Dickinson's last stanza. In the line, "Or rather – he passed us –," disrupts the flow of the poem's pace from the penultimate stanza. This rhythmic slow down signifies the moment of passing in the last two bars of the seventh line. Musically, however, it did not provide a compelling ending to the

melodic line. It lacked a necessary resolution during those last two bars of the seventh line. The rest of the melody, following that point, is utilized to properly end the piece. Though with death being the ultimate conclusion in this poem, it was only fitting to end the melody on the dominant of the scale. The instability created by ending on that note creates tension and an unresolved aura. The entire poem depicts Death as a pleasant experience but the moment of passing creates a sense of confusion and is effectively represented with the dominant, not the tonic, as the final note.

The music created for the Dickinson poem presented numerous challenges in the compositional process. The poem's structure and pace proved to be a useful source for musical inspiration. The melody also proved to be a useful tool to further understanding the poem. Both the melody and poem do confirm the fear that Death provides in its presence, despite our wishes to think otherwise.



Simpletense