

TIN HAT



x the rain is a handsome animal x
17 SONGS FROM THE POETRY OF E.E. CUMMINGS

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2.		
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1, 5, 6, 10, 12, 17 by B. Goldberg, *Njamin Music (ASCAP)*

3, 11, 16 by C. Kihlstedt, *Broca's Fold, (ASCAP)*

2, 7, 13, 15 by M. Orton, *Tunguska Music (BMI)*

4, 8, 14 by R. Reich, *Robreichmusic (ASCAP)*

9 by R. Reich, *Robreichmusic (ASCAP)*, vocal melody transcribed from E. E. Cummings' recitation.

1. a cloud on a leaf (dedicated to Yoko Ono)

speaking of love(of
which Who knows the
meaning;or how dreaming
becomes

if your heart's mind)i
guess a grassblade
Thinks beyond or
around(as poems are

made)Our picking it. this
caress that laugh
both quickly signify
life's only half(through

deep weather then
or none let's feel
all)mind in mind flesh
In flesh succeeding disappear

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

2. the rain is a handsome animal

music by mark orton

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

3. sweet spring

"sweet spring is your
time is my time is our
time for springtime is lovetime
and viva sweet love"

(all the merry little birds are
flying in the floating in the
very spirits singing in
are winging in the blossoming)

lovers go and lovers come
awandering awondering
but any two are perfectly
alone there's nobody else alive

(such a sky and such a sun
i never knew and neither did you
and everybody never breathed
quite so many kinds of yes)

not a tree can count his leaves
each herself by opening
by shining who by thousands mean
only one amazing thing

(secretly adoring shyly
tiny winging darting floating
merry in the blossoming
always joyful selves are singing)

"sweet spring is your
time is my time is our
time for springtime is lovetime
and viv sweet love"

music by carla kihlstedt
strings arranged by carla kihlstedt & mark orton

ben goldberg: clarinet
carla kihlstedt: violin, viola & voice
mark orton: guitar
rob reich: piano

4. if up's the word

if up's the word;and a world grows greener
 minute by second and most by more—
 if death is the loser and life is the winner
 (and beggars are rich but misers are poor)
 —let's touch the sky:

with a to and a fro

(and a here there where)and away we go

in even the laziest creature among us
 a wisdom no knowledge can kill is astir—
 now dull eyes are keen and now keen eyes are keener
 (for young is the year,for young is the year)
 —let's touch the sky:

with a great(and a gay
 and a steep)deep rush through amazing day

it's brains without hearts have set saint against sinner;
 put gain over gladness and joy under care—
 let's do as an earth which can never do wrong does
 (minute by second and most by more)
 —let's touch the sky:

with a strange(and a true)

and a climbing fall into far near blue

if beggars are rich(and a robin will sing his
 robin a song)but misers are poor—
 let's love until noone could quite be(and young is
 the year,dear)as living as i'm and as you're
 —let's touch the sky:

with a you and a me

and an every(who's any who's some)one who's we

music by rob reich

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

5. open his head

open his head,baby
& you'll find a heart in it
(cracked)

open that heart, mable
& you'll find a bed in it
(fact)

open this bed,sibyl
& you'll find a tart in it
(wed)

open the tart,lady
& you'll find his mind in it
(dead)

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: piano

6. unchanging

one

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snowflake

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one

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: contra alto clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

7. buffalo bill (*dedicated to Eric Beenfeldt*)

Buffalo Bill's
defunct

who used to

ride a watersmooth-silver

stallion

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what i want to know is

how do you like your blueeyed boy

Mister Death

music by mark orton

carla kihlstedt: voice

mark orton: strummed piano, autoharp & marxophone

with-

andy harris: euphonium & trombone

james gregg: trumpet

jen harrison: french horn

mark vehrencamp: tuba

8. enormous room

music by rob reich

ben goldberg: contra alto clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

9. so shy shy shy

So shy shy shy (and with a
look the very boldest man
can scarcely dare to meet no matter

how he'll try to try)

So wrong (wrong wong) and with a
smile at which the rightest man
remembers there is such a thing

as spring and wonders why

So gay gay gay and with a
wisdom not the wisest man
will partly understand (although

the wisest man am i)

So young young young and with a
something makes the oldest man
(whoever he may be) the only
man who'll never die

*vocal melody transcribed by carla kihlstedt
from ee cummings' reading - (caedmon classics)
clarinet trio written by rob reich*

*ben goldberg: clarinet and contra alto clarinet
carla kihlstedt: voice*

10. 2 little whos (*dedicated to Nels Cline & Yuka Honda*)

2 little whos
 (he and she)
 under are this
 wonderful tree

smiling stand
 (all realms of where
 and when beyond)
 now and here

(far from a grown
 -up i&you-
 ful world of known)
 who and who

(2 little ams
 and over them this
 aflame with dreams
 incredible is)

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

11. yes is a pleasant country

yes is a pleasant country;
if's wintry
(my lovely)
let's open the year

both is the very weather
(not either)
my treasure,
when violets appear

love is a deeper season
than reason;
my sweet one
(and april's where we're)

music by carla kihlstedt

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin, viola, bass harmonica & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: accordion

12. grapefruit

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: piano

13. human rind

this is a rubbish of human rind
with a photograph
clutched in the half
of a hand and the word
love underlined

this is a girl who died in her mind
with a warm thick scream
and a keen cold groan
while the gadgets purred
and the gangsters dined

this is a deaf dumb church and blind
with an if in its soul
and a hole in its life
where the young bell tolled
and the old vine twined

this is a dog of no known kind
with one white eye
and one black eye
and the eyes of his eyes
are as lost as you'll find

music by mark orton

ben goldberg: contra alto clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

*mark orton: dobro, tenor guitar, hurdy gurdy, autoharp, tremoloa,
marxophone, pump organ & bass harmonica*

rob reich: accordion

14. anyone lived in a pretty how town

this is a rubbish of human kind
 anyone lived in a pretty how town
 (with up so floating many bells down)
 spring summer autumn winter
 he sang his didn't he danced his did

Women and men(both little and small)
 cared for anyone not at all
 they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
 sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few
 and down they forgot as up they grew
 autumn winter spring summer)
 that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
 she laughed his joy she cried his grief
 bird by snow and stir by still
 anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
 laughed their cryings and did their dance
 (sleep wake hope and then)they
 said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
 (and only the snow can begin to explain
 how children are apt to forget to remember
 with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess
 (and noone stooped to kiss his face)
 busy folk buried them side by side
 little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

music by rob reich

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

*mark orton: dobro, tenor guitar, strummed and plucked piano, young
bell, tubular bells, hurdy gurdy & bass harmonica*

rob reich: accordion

15. diminutive

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e this park is e
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 ody's elsewher
 e except me 6 e

nglish sparrow
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music by mark orton

carla kihlstedt: violin, viola & voice

mark orton: celesta

rob reich: accordion

with-

megan orton: violin

marilyn de oliveira: cello

16. little i

who are you, little i

(five or six years old)
peering from some high

window; at the gold

of november sunset

(and feeling: that if day
has to become night

this is a beautiful way)

music by carla kihlstedt

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: e-string violin, voice

mark orton: dobro

rob reich: accordion

17. now(more near ourselves than we)

now(more near ourselves than we)
is a bird singing in a tree,
who never sings the same thing twice
and still that singing's always his

eyes can feel but ears may see
there never lived a gayer he;
if earth and sky should break in two
he'd make them one(his song's so true)

who sings for us for you for me
for each leaf newer than can be:
and for his own(his love)his dear
he sings till everywhere is here

music by ben goldberg

ben goldberg: clarinet

carla kihlstedt: violin & voice

mark orton: guitar

rob reich: piano & accordion

the rain is a handsome animal

By John Schaefer

Tin Hat's polyglot chamber music is easy to like, hard to describe. Yes, you can point to the various threads they weave together: small-ensemble jazz, vintage pop, film music, and that vast swath of traditional music we've taken to calling Americana. Or you can refer to some of the touchstone figures who seem to loom large in the band's pantheon: Erik Satie, Astor Piazzolla, Ennio Morricone, Django Reinhardt. But all the talk about what kind of band Tin Hat is misses an important point: Tin Hat is a quartet of composers. And those four composers share a love for the poetry of **E.E. Cummings**.

It actually makes perfect sense: Cummings also drew freely on high art (classical forms and poetic devices) and the sounds of what we might call "just plain folk" (including the blues). He took these elements and made something unique from them. Cummings' poetry, when seen on the page, can be a disorienting experience, with its quixotic spacing, word breaks, and punctuation. But it is also inherently musical, and - like Tin Hat's music - profoundly American.

This album, *the rain is a handsome animal*, is the quartet's take on a 200-year-old classical music form - the song cycle. They've done occasional songs before; violinist Carla Kihlstedt also sings, and prior Tin Hat records have seen guest vocals by friends like Willie Nelson and Tom Waits. But this project gave the band a chance to showcase Carla's expressive and slightly husky/velvety voice, and to respond to the singular sound of Cummings' words. That's not just a metaphor, by the way. In the song *so shy shy shy*, the music literally does grow out of the sound of the words, as recorded by Cummings himself in 1958. The poet's reading has a strongly implied tune, which Carla turned into an explicit melody; then keyboardist Rob Reich arranged a clarinet trio to accompany Carla's voice. The result has the spare, elegant appeal of a classical art-song, albeit one inspired, Rob says, by Duke Ellington's clarinet writing (as well as the playing of clarinetist Ben Goldberg).

Of course this is a Tin Hat album, so there are as many species of art-song as there are varieties of poems. Cummings himself once said that some of his poems were meant to be heard, while others were strictly meant to be read, with their placement on the page an integral part of the work. These latter poems pose some intriguing challenges, although as Carla explains, the poet himself offered some guidance: "Even in his own readings, Cummings chooses musical phrasing over visual spacing. Sometimes a parenthesis would inform my delivery, but in most cases my allegiances and priorities were with the music and not with conveying the peculiarities of the syntax."

So while *diminutive* appears choppy and hard to read on the page, in guitarist Mark Orton's setting the poem genuinely "sings" - as the subtle interplay of strings and celesta follows the descent of "the rain the rain the rain." On other occasions, though,

Cummings' unconventional orthography made for some remarkable choices. In *unchanging*, a poem that describes a snowflake's gentle landing on a grave stone, the text, Carla says, "is fairly falling down the page in a line, with letters and syllables disjointed from each other, but making one shape together. The last word, *gravestone*, is split so that the last line simply says 'one,' making the first and last words of the poem the same. Although sometimes live I do sing 'gravestone,' on the record I sing 'grav-est one'."

That decision highlights the collaborative nature of Tin Hat's process, since the composer of *unchanging* was Ben Goldberg. The ostinato figure that recurs in the song was something he'd already written, and he was looking for "a poem that could push against the music in the right way." On the album's opening track, *a cloud on a leaf*, Ben found an even more creative way in. The poem is usually known as *speaking of love*(of (like most Cummings' poems, it has no title and is usually referred to by its first line). But by taking a line from a poem that Ben himself had once written, and dedicated to Yoko Ono, and using that as the title, "then, right away," he says, "it's my song, using his words."

The album is bookended by another Ben Goldberg setting, of *now(more near ourselves than we)*, which returns to the opening track's sound-world, one haunted by the ghosts of long-gone tangos and popular jazz combos – not a dance, but a dream of a dance. In between are fifteen other, varied approaches to Cummings' work, including three that are purely instrumental. One is Mark Orton's title track, a tricky, Thelonious Monk-style melody driven by Mark's urgent, slapping guitar; another is Rob Reich's *the enormous room*, which refers not to a poem but to Cummings' early autobiographical novel. (Not surprisingly, Carla didn't turn in an instrumental piece, but she did offer a striking "vocal" solo on the violin in the enormous room – sure to be a highlight of the band's live sets.)

Mark points out that responding instrumentally to a poem is the way he would normally work anyway; but Cummings' poetry suggested other avenues. "His particular way of presenting the poems on the page only serves to widen the possibilities," he says. "His poems can serve as a great lesson in deconstruction I think." Mark's own setting of *buffalo bill*, for example, mines a single phrase – where the poet, mourning the loss of the war hero-turned-international showman, asks Death "how do you like your blueeyed boy"? "There's something so melancholic to me about calling him a 'blue eyed boy'," he says. The resulting piece, with its strummed piano and plaintive brass, is one of the album's most poignant moments. But as the brass choir grows more chromatic, simple melancholy gives way to a curious, indefinable mix of emotions... And that, some would say, is poetry.

Some of the "deconstructions" go even further. Carla claims that Ben took the most liberties with the poems: "My favorite example is *open his head*. In the first statement of the poem, Ben leaves out all but the basic elements of each image. Then when it comes back, he uses the whole thing, so that 'open his head, you'll find a heart' becomes 'open his head, baby, and you'll find a heart in it (cracked).' It was such a great intuition to withhold parts of the image at first."

The word play in open his head is accompanied by some Impressionist touches of clarinet, piano, and violin. Other poems, though, were more straightforward, and led in different musical directions. Rob Reich chose two poems, *anyone lived in a pretty how town* and *if up's the word*, which "represent his more traditional style. They are already very close to songs, and therefore obvious choices for setting to music." *anyone lived in a pretty how town* is a catchy folk song, distant kin to Ralph Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge*, an early 20th century song cycle that used the language of English folk music. Only here, the pastoral countryside is not Shropshire, England, but someplace closer to home – Carolina's Piedmont Mountains, perhaps.

Even simpler is *little i* – wherein Cummings captures the essence of both sunset and the young boy watching it. Carla Kihlstedt's setting is built around her e-string violin (an instrument she has used to magical effect in her song "Hold My Own" with her band Two Foot Yard). Using four e-strings, the thinnest, highest of the usual four fiddle strings, she creates tremulous, glittering textures that illuminate the poem's crepuscular, almost spectral mood.

There is much more here, from the calliope waltz of *yes is a pleasant country* to the jangly, brooding darkness of *human rind*. But somehow, all of these disparate parts cohere, both because of their shared source of inspiration and because of the musicians' shared sense of adventure and collaboration. *the rain is a handsome animal* is a song cycle. But it is also something else, equally traditional, and perhaps these days, equally old-fashioned: it is an album. Its effect is cumulative, and while you can easily pick out a few tracks for an iPod playlist, the best way to experience this fusion of poetry and music is as a whole.

John Schaefer is the program director and host of WNYC's Soundcheck and New Sounds and has written extensively about music, including books, TV programs, and magazines.

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"anyone lived in a pretty how town", "if up's the word and a world grows greener", "now(more near ourselves than we)", "open his head,baby", "sweet spring is your", "yes is a pleasant country", "So shy shy shy(and with a", "Buffalo Bill's", "dim", "2 little whos", "speaking of love(of", "one// t", "this is a rubbish of human rind", "who are you,little i", from COMPLETE POEMS: 1904-1962 by E. E. Cummings, edited by George J. Firmage. Copyright 1923, 1925, 1926, 1931, 1935, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, (c) 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 by the Trustees for the E. E. Cummings Trust. Copyright (c) 1973, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1991 by George James Firmage. Used by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

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record and mix engineer: **MARK ORTON**. *assistant engineers:* **JESSE EMERSON & MIKE MOORE**. *recorded at* **DEAD AUNT THELMA'S, PORTLAND, OR.** *mixed at* **CAMP WATERTOWN STUDIO, PORTLAND, OR.** *mastering engineer:* **JON COHRS**. *mastered at* **SPLEENLESS MASTERING, BROOKLYN NY.** *additional recording:* **JON EVANS** *at* **BRICK HILL, ORLEANS, MA,** *and* **ELI CREWS** *at* **NEW, IMPROVED RECORDING, OAKLAND, CA.** *additional musicians:* **MARK VEHRENCAMP - Tuba; ANDY HARRIS - Euphonium & Trombone; JEN HARRISON - French Horn; JAMES GREGG - Trumpet; MARILYN DE OLIVEIRA - Cello; MEGAN ORTON - Violin.** *graphic design:* **DM STITH**. *cover photo:* **BUCKNER SUTTER**. *inset photo:* **PETER GANNUSHKIN**. *art direction:* **CARLA KIHLESTEDT**. *Thank You:* **HANS WENDL, MARK & DIANE ORTON, MEGAN & MAX ORTON, MATTHIAS & TALLULAH BOSSI, MAGGIE & ARNOLD BOSSI, ETHAN & REUBEN GOLDBERG, MOLLY BARKER, KALLY & JUNE PRICE, JON EVANS & ALISON SUPPLE-EVANS, and ELIZABETH CLEMENTSON at W.W. NORTON & COMPANY.**

