

KIAN RAVAEI

SESTINA

FOR BASS CLARINET IN B-FLAT

COMPOSER'S NOTE

The sestina is among the most virtuosic poetic forms. Elizabeth Bishop, one of its masters, called it “a sort of stunt.” In the first stanza, each of six lines ends with a different word. Subsequent stanzas use the same six words at line-ends, but in a different order which is determined by a fixed pattern. Each word is used in a new light every time it appears, creating a poignant counterpoint of form and meaning. The sestina ends with an envoi in which all six words appear in the span of three lines.

This musical sestina is made up of short, six-phrase melodies inspired by movements from Bach partitas, each phrase ending with one of six notes. The order of these notes differs from movement to movement, following the same sequence as the poetic form. It is revealed in the final movement that these six notes belong to a favorite chorale melody of Bach, “Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied” (Sing to the Lord a New Song).

—Kian Ravaei
July 2020

PERFORMANCE NOTE

The performer may choose to omit all even-numbered movements.

duration ca. 11.5'

Sestina

by Edmund Gosse (1873)

In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose,
Arnaut, great master of the lore of love,
First wrought sestinas to win his lady's heart,
Since she was deaf when simpler staves he sang,
And for her sake he broke the bonds of rhyme,
And in this subtler measure hid his woe.

"Harsh be my lines," cried Arnaut, "harsh the woe
My lady, that enthorn'd and cruel rose,
Inflicts on him that made her live in rhyme!"
But through the metre spake the voice of Love,
And like a wild-wood nightingale he sang
When thought in crabbed lays to ease his heart.

It is not told if her untoward heart
Was melted by her poet's lyric woe,
Or if in vain so amorously he sang;
Perchance through cloud of dark conceits he rose
To nobler heights of philosophic love,
And crowned his later years with sterner rhyme.

This thing alone we know; the triple rhyme
Of him who bared his vast and passionate heart
To all the crossing flames of hate and love,
Wears in the midst of all its storm of woe,—
As some loud morn of March may bear a rose,—
The impress of a song that Arnaut sang.

"Smith of his mother-tongue," the Frenchman sang
Of Lancelot and of Galahad, the rhyme
That beat so bloodlike at its core of rose,
It stirred the sweet Francesca's gentle heart
To take that kiss that brought her so much woe
And sealed in fire her martyrdom of love.

And Dante, full of her immortal love,
Stayed his drear song, and softly, fondly sang
As though his voice broke with that weight of woe;
And to this day we think of Arnaut's rhyme
Whenever pity at the labouring heart
On fair Francesca's memory drops the rose.

Ah! sovereign Love, forgive this weaker rhyme!
The men of old who sang were great at heart,
Yet have we too known woe, and worn thy rose.

to Paul Demers

SESTINA

for bass clarinet in B-flat

Edmund Gosse

Kian Ravaei
(2020)

I. Allemande

Maestoso ♩ = ca. 66*



*) All tempos are approximate and played with a little rubato.

**) All grace notes are played before the beat.

II. First Stanza

(read aloud)

In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose,
Arnaut, great master of the lore of love,
First wrought sestinas to win his lady's heart,
Since she was deaf when simpler staves he sang,
And for her sake he broke the bonds of rhyme,
And in this subtler measure hid his woe.

IV. Second Stanza

(read aloud)

“Harsh be my lines,” cried Arnaut, “harsh the woe
My lady, that enthorn'd and cruel rose,
Inflicts on him that made her live in rhyme!”
But through the metre spake the voice of Love,
And like a wild-wood nightingale he sang
When thought in crabbed lays to ease his heart.

V. Air

♩ = ca. 92

*mf* scherzando, sempre

rit.

b tr

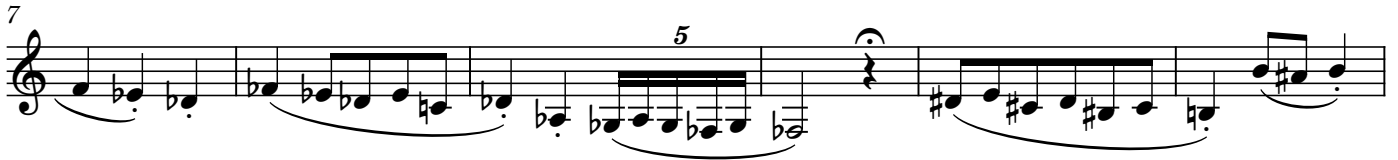
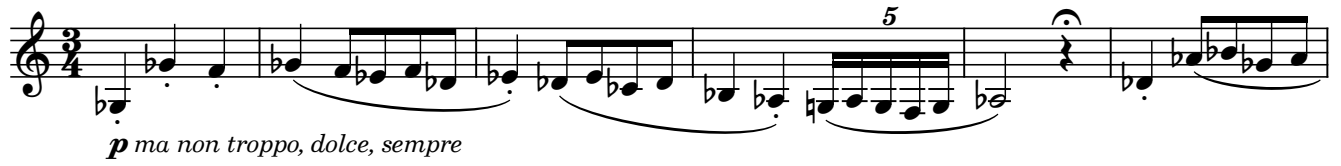
VI. Third Stanza

(read aloud)

It is not told if her untoward heart
Was melted by her poet's lyric woe,
Or if in vain so amorously he sang;
Perchance through cloud of dark conceits he rose
To nobler heights of philosophic love,
And crowned his later years with sterner rhyme.

VII. Menuet

♩ = ca. 120



VIII. Fourth Stanza

(read aloud)

This thing alone we know; the triple rhyme
Of him who bared his vast and passionate heart
To all the crossing flames of hate and love,
Wears in the midst of all its storm of woe,—
As some loud morn of March may bear a rose,—
The impress of a song that Arnaut sang.

IX. Sarabande

Grave, molto rubato ♩ = ca. 46

p sotto voce, poco espress., sempre

The musical score for IX. Sarabande is written in 3/4 time and consists of 11 measures. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is Grave, molto rubato, with a quarter note equal to approximately 46 beats. The dynamics are *p* (piano) sotto voce, poco espress. (little expression), and sempre (always). The score is divided into five systems, each starting with a measure number (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The first system (measures 1-2) includes a fermata over the second measure. The second system (measures 3-4) includes a fermata over the fourth measure. The third system (measures 5-6) includes a fermata over the sixth measure. The fourth system (measures 7-8) includes a fermata over the eighth measure. The fifth system (measures 9-11) includes a fermata over the eleventh measure. The score is written in a single staff with a treble clef.

X. Fifth Stanza

(read aloud)

“Smith of his mother-tongue,” the Frenchman sang
Of Lancelot and of Galahad, the rhyme
That beat so bloodlike at its core of rose,
It stirred the sweet Francesca's gentle heart
To take that kiss that brought her so much woe
And sealed in fire her martyrdom of love.

XI. Gigue

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 126$



XII. Sixth Stanza

(read aloud)

And Dante, full of her immortal love,
Stayed his drear song, and softly, fondly sang
As though his voice broke with that weight of woe;
And to this day we think of Arnaut's rhyme
Whenever pity at the labouring heart
On fair Francesca's memory drops the rose.

XIII. Gavotte

 $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 63$ 

XIV. Envoi

(read aloud)

Ah! sovereign Love, forgive this weaker rhyme!
The men of old who sang were great at heart,
Yet have we too known woe, and worn thy rose.

XV. Chorale*

♩ = ca. 54

p cantando e espress., sempre

6

10

rit.

*) Adapted from Matthäus Appelles von Löwenstern's chorale melody, "Singt dem Herrn ein neues Lied" (1644, Zahn 6424).