

Glossary

a cappella – without instrumental accompaniment

Contralto - the lowest female singing voice

Interpret - perform (a dramatic role or piece of music) in a particular way that conveys one's understanding of the creator's ideas.

Lyrics – the words of a song

Score - a written representation of a musical composition showing all the vocal and instrumental parts arranged one below the other.

Tempo - the speed at which a passage of music is or should be played.

Text setting - the process of aligning syllables of speech to specific musical pitches

Passaggio – a term used in classical singing to describe the transition area between the vocal registers.

Personification – the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.

Lyrics

Are you alive?

Your lines creep like tendrils down my skin.

Each line is a gentle caress, a pearl-shaped candy on my tongue.

And with each word I feel explosive joy to be a spectator.

Are you, package of sounds, breathing for me?

Am I breathing for you?

Are either of us breathing?

Are we holding our breath?

Are we alive?

I shift in my seat; the role of spectator has begun to constrict, to itch.

But I can't tell the story

I can't let the narrative flow forth

I don't know if I'm alive.

Am I sleeping?

Am I real?

Is this real?

So many syllables.

That laugh some stranger on the street is playing on loop in my head.

It frightens me.

It sounded so far away.

Like there was a sheet of glass between us.



Like I was underwater and could not come up to breathe because the surface of the pool had frozen over.

And overhead, in that terrifying overhead, I heard this echo of a laugh.

It trickles down to me like the last bits of sunlight.

Or maybe it's the opposite.

Is the laugh trapped in the pool?

I can't tell a story.

Because I can't begin one.

How do they start, stories?

Where does reality begin?

And where does fiction fade.



Listen

Loosey goosey tempo

The composer, Jack Gjaja, uses a unique instruction for the tempo of this piece. Gjaja gives a range for the beat of the quarter note, from 60 beats per minute to 100 beats per minute. Gjaja also includes the following text, "loosey goosey tempo, wondering and wandering." When you're listening to the piece, can you hear the loosey goosey tempo? Do you hear the singer utilizing various beats per minute?

Dig Deeper

Personify It!

Questions for a Poem uses lyrics written by the composer. The lyrics utilize a literary technique known as *personification*. Personification is when human characteristics are attributed to something that is nonhuman, in this case, a poem.

Create and Make

Write a poem of questions

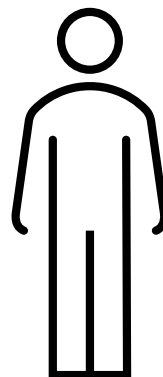
Try your hand at writing a poem that personifies an object. Then add some music!

Listen

Loosey goosey tempo

Throughout the score, Gjaja includes further instructions for the singer to help them navigate the loosey goosey tempo. The instructions include:

- tentative at first
- in anticipation
- still, focused
- talking voice
- elastic vowels
- murmur
- like a yawn
- dizzy, losing touch
- prayer-like, solemn
- distant, disembodied
- conversational
- foggy and soft



Can you hear the singer interpret these instructions? Where in the piece do you hear them? How would you interpret them?

Dig Deeper

Personify It!

The lyrics of this piece are a poem that is “speaking” to a poem. By setting it to music, the lyrics are now being sung to a poem. Does the addition of music intensify the personification of the poem? What nonhuman thing would you ask questions to if you could? Go ahead and pick something to personify! Maybe it’s a pet or your favorite piece of clothing.

Create and Make

Write a poem of questions

Once you’ve picked an object to personify, write a poem full of questions for that object. Gjaja’s poem is free verse, meaning there is no clear structure or rhyming pattern. You can try that, or you can try a traditional poem structure like a haiku or sonnet. Once you have your poem, maybe you want to add more to it like the composer did. Try composing a melody for it. Start by humming or playing some notes on a nearby instrument.