



david lang

love fail

1. *he was and she was* 8:04
2. *break #1 – three years* (Clare McNamara, mezzo-soprano) 0:43
3. *dureth* 1:15
4. *a different man* (Carrie Cheron, mezzo-soprano) 1:18
5. *the wood and the vine* 9:01
6. *right and wrong* (Sonja Tengblad, soprano) 2:30
7. *you will love me* 2:47
8. *forbidden subjects* (Sarah Brailey, soprano) 2:43
9. *as love grows stronger* 5:54
10. *break #2 – instrumental* 0:15
11. *the outing* (Emily Marvosh, alto) 1:43
12. *I live in pain* 3:50
13. *head, heart* 3:19
14. *break #3 – if I have to drown* 3:10
15. *mild, light* 4:39

Lorelei Ensemble

Beth Willer, artistic director
and conductor

Elizabeth Bates, soprano

Sonja Tengblad, soprano

Sarah Brailey, soprano

Carrie Cheron, mezzo-soprano

Christina English, mezzo-soprano

Clare McNamara, mezzo-soprano

Stephanie Kacoyanis, alto

Emily Marvosh, alto



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Mastering: **Kyle Pyke, Jesse Lewis**

love fail is dedicated, with love, to **Joe Melillo**.

The choral version of *love fail* was written for Lorelei Ensemble and premiered January 10, 2016 at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, MA.

love fail was written for and premiered by Anonymous 4 on June 29th, 2012, at the International Festival of Arts & Ideas; New Haven CT with support from the Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven CT.

love fail was originally staged in collaboration with Jennifer Tipton (lighting), Jim Findlay (set and video), Suzanne Bocanegra (costumes), and Jody Elff (sound design), produced by Beth Morrison and directed by David Lang.

love fail was co-commissioned by The Brooklyn Academy of Music's 2012 Next Wave Festival, The International Festival of Arts & Ideas, The John F.

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the wood and the vine, was commissioned by The Newman Center for the Performing Arts at University of Denver, The University of California at Riverside, and the Santa Fe Concert Association in Santa FE, NM.

I live in pain, in a different version, was originally written for "The Crossing," Donald Nally, conductor

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a note from the composer

Why is it that people still like the story of Tristan and Isolde? It has been told repeatedly for almost 1000 years, in many different versions, with all manner of strange details added or changed. “The greatest love story ever!” But why? Of course, there is excitement, drama, love, lust, shame, death, dragons. I think the real reason why is because the love of Tristan and Isolde begins by accident—they drink a love potion. They didn’t mean to drink it, and they didn’t mean to fall in love. They drink and—BAM!—it starts. It is almost a laboratory experiment into what love might be like without any of the complications of how real love begins or works—without the excitement, embarrassment, frustration, guilt or competition present in the courtships of ordinary people.

I thought I might learn something about love if I could explore this in a piece, putting details abstracted from many different retellings of Tristan and Isolde next to texts that are more modern, more recognizable to us, more real. First I scoured the literature and took my favorite weird incidents from the originals; for example, in Marie de France’s version Tristan carves his name on a stick for Isolde to find, she sees it and immediately knows what message Tristan means to convey, and that message—incredibly—is many many pages long. Another example: Tristan and Isolde drink the potion, thinking it is wine, and Gottfried von Strassburg writes, dramatically, that it isn’t wine they are drinking, but a cup of their never-ending sorrow.

(This, near the chapter in which Gottfried lists all the other Germanic poets working in the 12th century, and then tells you how he rates among them.) I compiled the oddest incidents from these versions of their romance, took out all the names or technological information that would make the texts seem ancient, and put them next to stories by the contemporary author Lydia Davis. These stories are oddly similar to the Tristan stories—they are also about love, honor and respect between two people, but they are much more recognizable to us.

I based my words on scraps of the text I found on the internet—thank you google translate! I do want to acknowledge the translations of Robert W. Hanning & Joan Ferrante, A. T. Hatto, and Alan S. Fedrick, whose versions of these texts I consulted more than once.

I originally wrote *love fail* for the vocal quartet Anonymous 4, who specialized in both medieval and more recent music. It was, in part, their connection to the old and the new that made me want to write a piece for them, one that would cut back and forth between ancient and modern texts. A few years after writing it I heard a great recording by Lorelei that included my music and I immediately thought of making a larger version of the piece, just for them. I want to thank them for their musicality, their passion and their commitment.

—David Lang, 2012 / 2020

he was and she was

*(words by David Lang, after
Gottfried von Strassburg)*

he was a blessed man
he was an understanding man
he was an ecstatic man
he was a joyful man
he was a delightful man
he was a free man
he was a studious man
he was a masterful man

she was so wise
she was so fair
she was so shining
she was so lovely
she was so studious
she was so versed
she was so young
she was so fair

he was a persevering man
(he was so persevering)
he was a learned man
(he was so learned)
he was a skillful man
(he was so skillful)

he was a strong man
(he was so strong)
he was a skillful man
(he was so skillful)
he was an excelling man
(he was so excelling)
he was a fortunate man
(he was so fortunate)
he was a rare man
(he was so rare)

she was so masterful
she was so diligent
she was so refined
she was so polite
she was so accomplished
she was so lovely
she was so excellent
she was so dexterous

he was a fair man
he was a blessed man
he was an admirable man
he was a successful man
he was a noble man
he was an excellent man
he was a worthy man

he was a cherished man

she was so sweet
she was so soft
she was so secret
she was so wondrous
she was so charming
she was so lovely
she was so good
she was so young

break #1 (three years)

(words by David Lang, after Beroul)

three years
three years to the day after it started
it ended

dureth

(words by Sir Thomas Malory)

the joy of love is too short,
and the sorrow thereof,
and what cometh thereof,
dureth over long.

A Different Man

(words by Lydia Davis)

At night he was a different man.
If she knew him as he was in the
morning, at night she hardly recog-
nized him: a pale man, a gray man, a
man in a brown sweater, a man with
dark eyes who kept his distance
from her, who took offense, who was
not reasonable. In the morning, he
was a rosy king, gleaming, smooth-
cheeked and smooth-chinned,
fragrant with perfumed talc, coming
out into the sunlight with a wide
embrace in his royal red plaid robe...

the wood and the vine

*(words by David Lang, after
Marie de France)*

now I'll tell you a story
that is also the truth –
it is the truth
the wood and the vine
we all know this story
We have heard it before

it was told to us by everyone
and everyone told it to you
a man and a woman
they loved so much
and were so true
and they suffered so much
and on a single day, they died.
their love was forbidden
he went back to the place
where he was born.
but being apart made him
sick with despair.
don't be surprised -
a lover grieves
when love is far away
sadness can make us all
sick with despair
he stayed there for years, until,
at last,
he went back,
to get, to try, to hope
to get a message to his love
he hid in the woods
by where she lived

and found a path
where she might walk
he cut a branch and, on it,
he carved a single word –
his name –
and left it on the path
where she might find it.
then she would know the message
and she would know just what the
message meant.
later she came along the same path
and saw the piece of wood
she knew exactly what it was
she saw the single word carved
upon it
and she knew.
this is what she knew:
“dearest love
this is my message
I send it to you
I have waited for you
I have waited to see you
even now I am waiting for you in
the woods
I cannot live without you

I cannot live without you
“you and I –
we are like the vine that winds
itself around the branch
it twines and pulls and digs into
the flesh,
so tight that the two of them
become one
the two become one
if someone pulls the two apart
then both will die.
so it is with us, my love, so it is
with us.
you cannot live without me.
I cannot live without you.
I cannot live without you.
you cannot live without me.”
she went a short way into the woods
and found him
and they wept.
they wept with joy when they
were together
and they wept with sadness when
they left.
later he remembered the joy and the

sadness
and he wrote this song:
“the wood and the vine”
every word is true.
all true.

Right and Wrong

(words by Lydia Davis)

She knows she is right, but to say
she is right is wrong, in this case.
To be correct and say so is wrong, in
certain cases.

She may be correct, and she may say
so, in certain cases. But if she insists
too much, she becomes wrong, so
wrong that even her correctness
becomes wrong, by association.

It is right to believe in what she
thinks is right, but to say what she
thinks is right is wrong, in certain
cases.

She is right to act on her beliefs, in
her life. But she is wrong to report

her right actions, in most cases.
Then even her right actions become
wrong, by association.

If she praises herself, she may be
correct in what she says, but her say-
ing it is wrong, in most cases, and
thus cancels it, or reverses it, so that
although she was for a particular act
deserving of praise, she is no longer
in general deserving of praise.

you will love me

*(words by David Lang, after Gottfried
von Strassburg)*

you will love me
me, alone
above all others
above all other things
you will love me

we will live one life
we will die one death
we will share one joy
we will share one sorrow
it is not wine

it is our lasting sorrow
it is not wine
it is our never-ending anguish
and we drink it
we drink it

Forbidden Subjects

(words by Lydia Davis)

Soon almost every subject they
might want to talk about is associ-
ated with yet another unpleasant
scene and becomes a subject they
can't talk about, so that as time goes
by there is less and less they can
safely talk about, and eventually
little else but the news and what
they're reading, though not all of
what they're reading. They can't talk
about certain members of her fam-
ily, his working hours, her working
hours, rabbits, mice, dogs, certain
foods, certain universities, hot
weather, hot and cold room tempera-
tures at night and in the day, lights
on and lights off in the evening in

summer, the piano, music in general,
how much money he earns, what
she earns, what she spends, etc.
But one day, after they have been
talking about a forbidden subject,
though not the most dangerous of
the forbidden subjects, she realizes
it may be possible, sometimes, to say
something calm and careful about
a forbidden subject, so that it may
once again become a subject that
can be talked about, and then to say
something calm and careful about
another forbidden subject, so that
there will be another subject that
can be talked about once again, and
that as more subjects can be talked
about once again there will be, grad-
ually, more talk between them, and
that as there is more talk there will
be more trust, and that when there
is enough trust, they may dare to
approach even the most dangerous
of the forbidden subjects.

as love grows stronger
*(words by David Lang, after
Gottfried von Strassburg)*

as love grows stronger
love holds us closer
as love grows stronger
love holds us tight
as love grows stronger
as love grows stronger
we become more beautiful
to each other
this is the seed
from which love grows
from which love never dies
until....
until....
as it ever was
as it ever is
as it ever will be

break #2 (instrumental)

The Outing

(words by Lydia Davis)

An outburst of anger near the road,
a refusal to speak on the path, a
silence in the pine woods, a silence
across the old railroad bridge, an
attempt to be friendly in the water,
a refusal to end the argument on
the flat stones, a cry of anger on the
steep bank of dirt, a weeping among
the bushes.

I live in pain

*(words by David Lang, after
Beatriz, Comtessa de Dia)*

I live in pain
for someone I once had,
for someone I once wanted
for someone I once knew
for someone I once loved, without
measure.
I see now that he left me
because I did not give him all
my love

I see now I was wrong
and now I sleep alone

I want to hold him
in my naked arms
I want to lie beside him
in my bed
I want him more
than any long-forgotten lovers ever
loved before
I want to give him everything
my heart
my love
my senses
my sight
my life
good friend, kind friend, fearless
friend
when will I have you?
when will you lie beside me?
when will I give you my love?
you know how much I want you.
promise me
you will do what I say
please.
do what I say

Head, Heart

(words by Lydia Davis)

Heart weeps.
Head tries to help heart.
Head tells heart how it is, again:
You will lose the ones you love.
They will all go. But even the earth
will go, someday.
Heart feels better, then.
But the words of head do not remain
long in the ears of heart.
Heart is so new to this.
I want them back, says heart.
Head is all heart has.
Help, head. Help heart.

break #3 (if I have to drown)

*(words by David Lang, after
Thomas of Britain, and the
Yom Kippur liturgy)*

if I have to drown, I know, that you
will drown
if I have to burn, I know, that you
will burn

if God wills it

if I have to bleed, I know, that you
will bleed
if I have to be devoured, I know,
that you will be devoured
if God wills it

if I have to starve, I know, that
you will starve
if I have to thirst, I know, that
you will thirst
if I have to wander, all my days,
I know, that you will wander, all
your days
if I have to suffer, I know, that
you will suffer

if I have to be impoverished, I know,
that you will be impoverished
if I have to be degraded, I know,
that you will be degraded
if God wills it
if God wills it, so be it.

mild, light

*(words by David Lang, after
Richard Wagner)*

mild, light
see him smile
see his eye, open –
do you see it?

he shines so bright
like a star, rising
do you see it? oh, yes, I see it

do you hear his heart?
do you smell his sweet breath?
do you? yes, I do

am I the only one
who hears this music?
oh, I hear it
it is so soft
it is so sad
it comes from him
through me, and up
and rises all around me

I hear it, I breathe it in
I drink it, It is so sweet

will we just fade?
buried in the raging storm?
buried beneath the ringing sound?

drowned
engulfed
unconscious
so sweet

special thanks

Lorelei Ensemble would like to extend special thanks to David Lang for his boundless enthusiasm, creativity and support.

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and **Julia Wolfe**

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