

- composer's note -

*Mad Magnificent Herald (Spring)* was commissioned by Hobart and William Smith Colleges for its chamber vocal group, Cantori, directed by Dr. Robert Cowles. Since the work was to be premiered in the spring, I chose two of the stanzas of E. E. Cummings' longer poem, "Epithalamion," that glorify that season. The music has madrigal tendencies, chiefly in the way the voices imitate each other, and in its occasional use of word-painting. The opening phrase, sung at the octave by all voices and reappearing several times throughout the work, is an homage to one of my teachers, Dominick Argento, who I imagined could have written such a phrase. Several musical exuberances are inspired by the sheer untrammelled joy of the Cummings text: the hesitant "mm, mm, mm, mm" after "forgetfulness," the "trump" with its lengthy rolled "r," the prolonged "s" on "whispers" and "silence," and the word "primeval" degenerating into a wind-through-the-pines sound effect.

- text -

And still the mad magnificent herald Spring  
assembles beauty from forgetfulness  
with the wild trump of April:

A silver sudden parody of snow  
tickles the air to golden tears, and hark!  
the flicker's laughing yet, while on the hills  
the pines deepen to whispers primeval and throw  
backward their foreheads to the barbarous bright  
sky, and suddenly from the valley thrills  
the unimaginable upward lark  
and drowns the earth and passes into light

And still the mad magnificent herald Spring  
assembles beauty...

O still miraculous May! O shining girl  
of time untarnished! O small intimate  
gently primeval hands, frivolous feet  
divine! O singular and breathless pearl!  
O indefinable frail ultimate pose!  
O visible beatitude sweet sweet  
intolerable! silence immaculate  
of god's evasive audible great rose!

from "Epithalamion" (1923) by e. e. cummings