

among the vanishing (1989), soprano & string quartet, commissioned by Dawn Upshaw, the Kronos String Quartet and Lincoln Center, Boosey & Hawkes - 1992. (35')

among the vanishing Program note
Note written by Neil Tesser

among the vanishing, for string quartet and soprano voice utilizes texts by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke -- but not his poetry. The writings were selected from his letters, except for one ("Rose, a pure contradiction . . .") which is taken from Rilke's epitaph. These fragmented texts were chosen and assembled by composer Steven Mackey not to project a narrative, but rather to splay images across a musical canvas.

among the vanishing is for quartet and voice, but it is not a vocal solo with accompaniment: the voice is a co-equal instrument, and the texts rise out of, or fall into, the continuously unfolding music. The music presents parallel images to Rilke's, but the music does not directly shadow the those images: "The music is often in transition," explains Mackey, "while the singer delivers the concrete image" -- embedding the words in the more fluid substance of musical expression.

In Rilke's work ideas and emotions are often embedded in contrasting thoughts and images (ie."a tinge of amethyst in a pocket of rock crystal") and this sensibility guided Mackey's work on among the vanishing. "I can see now that I was working in layers," says the composer, "that some thing very soulful and expressive could be embedded, and was, in something hard and bright: layers of contradiction, overlapping each other."