



[Anonymous 4 Marks A Milestone Year, Together And Alone](#)

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As of this year, the vocal group Anonymous 4 has been introducing modern audiences to medieval music for a quarter century. When the all-female quartet asked David Lang to help mark the occasion by writing them some music, he didn't need any convincing. The Pulitzer Prize-winning composer was already a big fan.

"I really like the fact that they had dedicated themselves to keeping alive this music from 800 years ago," Lang says. "This music is really at the core of a lot of things that we think of and believe still, as musicians today. And I wondered what it would be like to design a project for them that would be about the collision between modern things and the old world where they normally live."

The resulting work, *love fail*, has its New York premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this evening. Lang drew his inspiration for the piece from the medieval story of the doomed lovers Tristan and Isolde. Their tale has been the subject of music and literature for centuries. Lang has looked at different versions, stripped them to their essence, and juxtaposed them with some writings by contemporary poet Lydia Davis. The result is less a narrative than a series of musings on how mythology and our own relationships today mirror one another.

"The things in our life that cause us to fight with our loved ones, the things that really upset us, the things that really make us miserable, are not dragons and love potions and, you know, betrayed honor and sorcery," Lang says. "They really are things that are much more ordinary and much more normal. And yet because they're ours, they actually have much more power to do damage to us."

As beautiful as Anonymous 4's vocal blend is, Lang says he wanted to find ways to highlight each of the singers over the course of this hourlong piece.

"One of the things that I really wanted to take advantage of was the fact that they're so different individually than they are together," he says. "So there are moments of this piece that have this kind of intense homophony, where they're called upon to blend the way [vocalists] have been blending for 800 years. There are solos and duos and things that really shine lights on them as individual characters. I wrote those specifically for them, not only just as voice types, but also as people."

One of the solos, sung by Anonymous 4 member Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatek, comes right before the final moments of the piece. It's called "If I Have to Drown."

"If you're in a relationship with somebody — in a committed relationship with somebody — whatever happens to you happens to them," Horner-Kwiatek explains. "If I have to drown, then you have to drown. If I have to starve, then you have to starve, if God wills it. It's just me — there's no percussion, there's nobody else singing. It's just one of those very direct statements."

While *love fail* is, at its heart, a concert, Lang has brought several theatrical levels to it. There's a video with medieval imagery, the text is projected, the singers wear costumes and occasionally play percussion instruments, and the light shifts with the musical mood.

"You know, Anonymous 4, they're not actors," Lang says. "They don't want to walk around. You don't want them to talk or play with props ... To me, the things that are most powerful about them are they look at each other while they sing, they smile at each other, they breathe together. Those things should be magnified; those things should be meaningful, you know? And we should see that. We shouldn't do anything, theatrically, that would take away from that."

Ultimately, Lang hopes that audiences will be moved by the universal themes in *love fail*, whether joyous or sad.

"My love will end, my life will end," he says. "And all the lives and loves of the people around us will. And why shouldn't our art reflect the world we live in and not the world that we remember through mythology?"