

EQUATION-program note

Equation was inspired by the Poem, “An Equation” by Hyam Plutzik (1911-1962). I met Hyam’s daughter, Deborah Plutzik in 1975 while I was teaching composition in the Rush Heniretta School District in Rochester NY. She introduced me to her father’s remarkable poetry. I used the imagery of the “grave serpent” to build my musical concept. As good fortune would have it, Deborah later became my sister-in-law—marrying my brother Jeff Briggs.

An Equation

For instance: $y - xa + mx^2(a^2 + 1) = 0$

Coil upon coil, the grave serpent holds
Its implacable strict pose, under a light
Like marble. The artist’s damnation, the rat of time,
Cannot gnaw this form, nor event touch it with age.
Before it was, it existed, creating the mind
Which created it, out of itself. It will dissolve
Into itself, though in another language.
Its changes are not in change, nor its times in time.
And the coiled serpent quivering under a light
Crueler than marble, unwinds slowly, altering
Deliberate the great convolutions, a dancer,
A mime on the brilliant stage. The sudden movement,
Swifter than creases of lightning, renews a statue:
There by its skin a snake rears beaten in copper.
It will not acknowledge the incense on your altars,
Nor hear at night in your room the weeping...

Hyam Plutzik, 1911 - 1962