



VERB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

At long last, *The Elements of Style* has been set to music

In the 1970s, *Schoolhouse Rock!* taught us rudimentary grammar via catchy tunes. Now, if *New Yorker* artist Maira Kalman and composer Nico Muhly have their way, a new generation will learn to enjoy the fundamentals of language through their multimedia adaptation of William Strunk and E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*. For decades, this reference guide has been a staple of composition classes, yet Kalman had never read it. But after flipping through a copy at a yard sale, she knew that she had to illustrate guidelines such as "knowledge" for syllabification (pictured). "The book is so lyrical and funny," Kalman says. "The sentences were just crying out for paintings."

Apparently they were also begging for classical melodies. After Kalman finished her edition of the tome, she commissioned Muhly to set the words to music. On Wednesday 19, their unconventional collaboration will premiere at the main branch of the New York Public Library.

Kalman's original artwork will be on display and a short film will project her images as Muhly's minimalist arias dramatize Strunk and White's no-nonsense prose. A tenor and soprano will sing rules such as "Be obscure clearly!" and "Nice, a shaggy, all-purpose word to be used sparingly." Meanwhile, a sextet of amateur percussionists—including Kalman herself—will pound on a variety of found objects. She seems particularly excited about getting the chance to perform. "Well, who doesn't want to be in showbiz?"

—*Raven Snook*

***The Elements of Style* will be performed Wednesday 19 in the Rose Main Reading Room at the New York Public Library, Fifth Ave at 42nd St, at 8pm. For tickets call 212-868-4444 or visit www.smarttix.com. The illustrated edition of *The Elements of Style* (Penguin, \$25) will be available October 20.**