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Advanced Conducting Project

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Advanced Conducting Project

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O Magnum Mysterium

Tomás Luis de Victoria

SATB

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Composer Background

Tomas Luis de Victoria was born in 1548 in Avila, Spain. As a child, he was a chorister at the Avila Cathedral and a student at the Jesuit School of St. Gil. When Victoria was about fifteen or sixteen his voice changed, so he entered the Jesuit Collegio Germanico in Rome. There, he was a singer, and eventually a teacher and maestro di cappella beginning in 1573. From 1569 through 1574 the composer was a singer and organist at St. Maria di Monserrato, and in 1575, he took minor orders for the priesthood.[1] Following that education, Victoria became a chaplain at the Church of St. Girolamo della Carita, where he continued to work from 1577 until 1582. During the dedication of Missarum libri duo to King Philip II of Spain in 1583, Victoria expressed his desire to return to Spain and serve as a priest. King Philip II appointed Victoria chaplain to his sister, Dowager Empress Maria, and Victoria then resided at the Monasterio de las Descalzes de St. Clara in Madrid. The composer held this position, along with maestro of convent choir, until Maria's death in 1603. Under Victoria's direction, the convent had one of the finest musical establishments in Spain, including a choir of four boys and twelve priests as well as instrumentalists on special occasions. Tomas Luis de Victoria passed away in 1611, in Madrid, Spain.[2]

The life of Tomas Luis de Victoria was a quiet one, and out of the public eye, although he and his music were known to other composers of the time. His music was widely circulated and highly respected. Victoria was acquainted with Palestrina, and may have even studied with him. He was also friendly with Guerrero. [3]

Throughout his career, Victoria composed only sacred music set to Latin text, and many of his works are for multiple choirs. This was a typical compositional style of Spain at the time. His compositional output included 20 masses, approximately 140 motets, 18 Magnificats, 9 sets of Lamentations and 2 passions. His *Missa pro Victoria* was popular with King Philip III, and his *Missa Ave regina coelorum* and

Missa Alma redemptoris mater were the best known and are the most frequently performed masses in the world. Victoria's compositions are characterized by pervasive imitation juxtaposed with brief portions of homophony, which was a common style in Rome and all of Spain during the latter decades of the sixteenth century.[4] His music is unique in its simplicity. The imitative polyphony is clear in texture while the harmonies are tonal and logically ordered. Phrases tend to be relatively short and well balanced while the melodic and rhythmic patterns are often subtly expressed.

Composition

O magnum mysterium, published in Venice in 1572, is one of the most economical pieces that Victoria wrote in terms of length and texture as well as subtle expressiveness. The piece uses sections of homophony and polyphony for expressive purposes.[5]

Tomas Luis de Victoria wrote his setting of *O magnum mysterium* at the age of 24. The piece was part of his first published collection called *Motecta* (Venice 1572) and would later be used as the basis of his parody mass *Missa O Magnum Mysterium*.[6] Unlike other settings of *O magnum mysterium,* Victoria clearly indicated that this piece was written for the Feast of Circumcision on January first, rather than for the Christmas Matins. This fact, combined with the fact that "O Beata Virgo" (O Blessed Virgin) is also found in another of Victoria's motets, "Vere languores nostros" written for "in Coena Domini" (the Lord's Supper), intrigued musicologist Robert Stevenson. He suggested Victoria's desire to link the shedding of blood at the circumcision to crucifixion, or between Mary and the cross, which were both found to be worthy to bear the savior.[7]

Historical Perspective

O magnum mysterium was originally a part of the Christmas Matins found in the *Liber usualis missae et officii pro dominicis et festis duplicibus cum cantu gregoriano* ('Book of common practice for Mass and Office for Sundays and double feasts, with Gregorian chant'), commonly known as *Liber Usualis.* The book was

compiled and issued by the monks of Solesmes in 1896 and is an extensive, although not a comprehensive collection of prayers, lessons and chants for the more important services of the Roman Catholic Church as prescribed between the Council of Trent (1545–63) and the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).[8] Included in the *Liber Usualis* are masses, vespers, matins, lauds and liturgies for services of all times of the liturgical year.

O magnum mysterium is the responsory after the 4th lesson of the Christmas Matins, or evening vespers.[9] The lesson includes the Christmas homily of Pope St. Leo the Great, which in English reads:

> Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born: let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness.
>
> No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing. Our Lord, victor over sin and death, finding no man free from sin, came to free us all. Let the saint rejoice as he sees the palm of victory at hand. Let the sinner be glad as he receives the offer of forgiveness. Let the pagan take courage as he is summoned to life.
>
> In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with its creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind.
> And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy:[10]

The response to this text in the original Liber Usualis reads:

O magnum mysterium
Et admirabile sacramentum
Ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
Jacentem in praesepio.
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt
Portare Dominum Jesum Christum.
Ave Maria gratia plena:
Dominus tecum Beata

English Translation:

O great mystery and wondrous
sacrament, that animals should see the
Lord newborn lying in a manger.
O blessed Virgin, whose womb was
worthy to bear the Lord Christ Jesus.
Hail Mary, full of grace:
The Lord is with thee, Blessed

Technical Considerations

O Magnum Mysterium begins in cut time and should be conducted with a two pattern. Measure thirty-nine is an obvious cadential point, therefore leading into it the conductor could choose to add a slight *ritardando*. If this is the chosen interpretation, measures thirty-eight and thirty-nine may be conducted in a four pattern in order to have greater control of the pulse. The 'Alleluia' section is written in three-four, and can be conducted in three or in one, depending on the chosen tempo. There should be an obvious relationship between the cut time and three-four sections, making sure to not rush the Alleluia's, while still making this section brighter. In measure sixty-six, the conductor will again want to slow into the cadence which leads back to the original tempo. The last four measures of the piece should slow down slightly to bring the piece to a close. Again, the conductor may want to switch to a four pattern in the last two measures to have more control of the tempo.

When rehearsing this piece, it will be helpful to illuminate moments of homophony verses those of polyphony. During the polyphonic moments, it may be helpful to have members of the choir stand up from their seats briefly at their entrance to show the entire choir how the voices overlap.

Stylistic Considerations

Compared to some of his predecessors, such as Palestrina, Victoria's motets are distinguished by a livelier interest in harmonic color, which he pursued by means of signed accidentals usually suggested by the meaning of the words.[11] There needs to be a clear balance within the choir between presenting the harmonic lines, as well as using the words to form the phrases. Clear horizontal and vertical harmonic understanding is another important consideration. One option to highlight word stress would be to have the choir write in the translations, or to underline where the stress of each word or phrase should be placed. Marking cadential moments would also help draw attention to important moments throughout the piece.

Musical Elements

Written in Aeolian mode, voices often echo each other as the piece uses much imitation. The harmonies are rather complex for the time, including many open 5ths (measures two, four, five, six, seven for example), and octaves (measures four, five, six, nine). There are long sustained dissonances and minor chord with voices that sound far apart (measure three, the D flat and B flat between the cantus (soprano) and altus (alto)). The dissonances are also approached in interesting, yet often difficult ways. In measure three the minor sixth on the D flat in the cantus (soprano) is approached and resolved by a half step. This causes intonation challenges. Again, in measure eleven, there is a fourth between the F and B flat of the B flat minor chord, where intonation will be critical. Another example of difficult dissonances includes those within melismatic passages, which are approached and left by a step. It will be essential for singers to know their intervallic relationships in order to sing the piece correctly. The Alleluia section of the piece is vastly different from the rest. The section is much brighter, including more major chords and less dissonance. The audience should clearly hear this change in texture.

Form and Structure

O Magnum Mysterium is written using imitative polyphony with moments of homophony. Voices are often paired for polyphonic entrances. For instance, the opening statement is sung in the soprano, followed by an alto entrance. In measure eight, the tenor echoes the soprano line almost identically, and the bass line is nearly identical to the opening alto line. In measure forty, 'O beata Virgo' is the first homophonic entrance in all four voice parts.

Representing the Trinity, the 'Alleluia' is set in three-four time. The major key and more homophonic feel lighten the piece drastically before the plagal cadence leading into the Picardy third on the final chord.

Text

Literal translation:

O magnum Mysterium
O great mystery

Et admirabile sacramentum
And admirable sacrament

Ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
That animals see the Lord born

Jacentem in praesepio
Lying in a manger

O beata Virgo, cujus viscera
O blessed virgin whose viscera (womb)

Meruerunt portare Dominum Christum
Worthy to bear the Lord Christ

Alleluja
Alleluia

Poetic translation:

O great mystery
And wondrous sacrament,
That animals should see the newborn Lord
Lying in a manger
O blessed virgin, whose womb was worthy
To bear the Lord Christ Jesus
Alleluia

And The Glory of the Lord
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
SATB/piano or trumpets, timpani, strings and basso continuo
Novello & Co. Ltd

Composer Background

George Frideric Handel was born in 1685 in Halle, Germany. As a child he studied music theory, organ, harpsichord and violin with Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow. Handel was appointed organist at a local Calvinist cathedral when he was seventeen.[12] By eighteen he moved to Hamburg and served as a violinist and harpsichordist in the opera orchestra. During his time in Hamburg, Handel became acquainted with Johann Mattheson, *Kapellmeister* of the Hamburg Cathedral, as well as Barthold Heinrich Brockes, author of an important Passion oratorio libretto set by numerous composers including Handel himself in 1716.[13] By the age of twenty-one, Handel moved to Italy where he began composing operas, oratorios, cantatas and motets for many important venues and patrons throughout the country. After gaining considerable fame, Handel was appointed *Kapellmeister* to the Elector of Hanover in 1710. Multiple visits to London during his time with the Elector put Handel in favor with Queen Anne of England, who was succeeded by the Elector of Hanover following her death, which meant that Handel eventually remained in England, becoming a British subject in 1727.[14] Handel lived in England for the remainder of his life holding positions such as resident composer to the Earl of Carnavon from 1717 to 1718, music director of the Royal Academy of Music from 1719 to 1728, codirector of the King's Theatre from 1729-1738 and composer at the Chapel Royal from 1732 until his death in 1759. Handel began to lose his sight in his left eye in 1751. He underwent surgery, which was unsuccessful and left him totally blind. This did not stop Handel from working diligently on new compositions and revivals of oratorios.[15] Handel passed away in his home on April 14, 1759.

Composition

Messiah, composed in England from August 22 through September 14, 1741 is a text taken directly from the Bible, compiled by Charles Jennens.[16] The piece was premiered on April 13, 1742 and was initially well received, but did not become popular until 1750 when it was presented for charity in the chapel of the Foundling Hospital in London.[17] It is interesting to note that four choruses from *Messiah* are borrowed from secular Italian duets that Handel composed just seven weeks before beginning the oratorio. "*For unto us a child is born"* and *"All we like sheep*" were taken from the two allegro portions of the cantata for two sopranos *No, di voi non vo' fidarmi*, and "*His yoke is a easy"* and *"And he shall purify*" were taken from the cantata *Quel fior che all' alba ride.*[18] There are many remarkable similarities between the choruses and their original counterparts. For example, the first thirty measures of "For unto us" and "No, di voi" differ only slightly in rhythm. The texts are strikingly different; including the fact that one is sacred while the other is secular.

Messiah is a great example of Handel's tendency to revise his pieces, even if they had already been performed publically. In 1745 Handel rewrote a choral version of "*Their sound is gone out,*" and in 1750 revised the arias "*But who may abide"* and *"Thou are gone up on high."*[19]

The text of the "*And the Glory of the Lord"* based on Isaiah 40:5 is divided into four parts, each with their own melodic material. These motifs are imitated throughout the movement, transformed by starting at different pitch classes, and modulated to related keys.

Historical Perspective

And the Glory of the Lord is the first Chorus in the *Messiah* Oratorio. Handel was well known for his oratorios. *Messiah* is one of the more frequently performed of Handel's oratorios, particularly around the Christmas and Easter season. *And the Glory of the Lord* is particularly accessible for a baroque piece, due to the lack of melismatic passages. The piece was written later in Handel's compositional career while he was the composer at the Chapel Royal in England.

Technical Considerations

The piece is written in three-four, but there are a few measures of hemiola which need to be considered. There are two ways to conduct this example of hemiola, and the conductor needs to make that decision ahead of time. The first example happens in measures nine and ten. The accented beats are one, three, two and one. The conductor can stay in three and show the emphasis clearly, or change to a two pattern for those measures. The same concept happens in measures thirty-six to thirty-seven, forty-one to forty-two, one hundred to one hundred one, and finally one hundred twenty-seven to one hundred twenty-eight. Hemiola was a common practice in the Baroque period, especially leading into cadential moments, which is the case in this piece.

When rehearsing this piece, it would be beneficial to point out the four phrases, and clearly explain to the choir where the emphasis should be placed, and what technique should be used. For example, the first phrase "and the glory, the glory of the Lord" the emphasis needs to be on 'glory' and 'Lord.' It is the general tendency for a choir to emphasize the smaller words without realizing it. This phrase should also have some space between the notes to mimic the instrumental parts, and should be very light. In contrast to this phrase, is "for the mouth of the lord hath spoken it" should have a nice weight and should be more connected.

Stylistic Considerations

Ideally, the piece should be performed with the orchestra. This would be the most authentic experience for a chorus. If an orchestra is not available, the accompanist should be aware of the role of the orchestra, and should imitate that style as authentically as possible.

And the Glory of the Lord is part of what is commonly known as the "Christmas" section of the oratorio, or Part One. It would be appropriate to perform just this section if performing the oratorio in its entirety was not an option.

Musical Elements

Handel uses the meter and the range of the phrases to emphasize important words in the text. In triple meter the downbeat is the most emphasized beat of the measure. The listener is also drawn to the highest note of the phrase. For instance, "glory" is on the downbeat, and "Lord" sung on the highest note of the first motif. In the second motif, "revealed" begins on the highest note of the phrase. The third motif emphasizes "flesh" and "see" with downbeats and "together" begins on the highest note of the phrase. "Mouth," "Lord," and "Spoken," are all downbeats in the final motif. Refer to the excerpts above. Handel put careful emphasis on the text throughout the Oratorio.

The first motif, "And the Glory of the Lord" is introduced in the alto line in measures eleven through fourteen. The first three notes outline a major chord. The phrase ends with the last three notes of an ascending major scale. The phrase spans an entire octave, from A to A. The text is set syllabically.

The second motif, "shall be revealed" is introduced in the tenor line in measures seventeen through twenty. This motif is built on a descending sequence starting on the word "revealed." It is approached by an ascending leap, followed by descending stepwise motion. This happens twice in this initial statement of this motif. Unlike the first phrase, the word "revealed" is set melismatically.

The third motif, "And all flesh shall see it together" is introduced in the alto line in measures forty-three through forty-six. More of the text is set melismatically, "flesh," "see," and "together." The notes A, G sharp, F sharp, and E are repeated three times within the phrase.

The final motif, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" is the only phrase introduced by two vocal parts. The tenors and basses sing the phrase for the first time in measures fifty-one through fifty-seven. This motif is mostly unison, which creates a chant-like effect and emphasizes the text. Unlike the first three motifs, which use a variety of pitches in the melody, this phrase centers on the tonic note A. Similar to the opening line, the text is set syllabically.

One way to emphasize the entrances of the various motifs is to have the voice parts stand up at their entrances. This will allow singers to see the interplay

between parts. The imitative nature of the piece makes the entrances a bit difficult. It is important to know how all of the voice parts work together.

The piece modulates between A major, E major, and B major, but stays diatonic to those keys once the modulations have occurred. The only tempo change that happens is at the very end of the piece. The last four measures are marked *Adagio* and should be drastically slower than the rest of the chorus.

There are no dynamics marked in this piece. Instead, Handel utilized terraced dynamics. Instruments and voices are added or taken away to emphasize important moments in the piece. Often, a new line of text is introduced in a single vocal line and then repeated homophonically or polyphonically. Fluctuation between numbers of voices creates changes in dynamic levels.

The tessitura is reasonably comfortable. The biggest concern would be the soprano line which sits near the top of the range for rather extended periods of time. Support and proper preparation will be critical.

Form and Structure

An eleven measure introduction leads into the first section (A, measures eleven through thirty-eight) which includes the first two motifs, and lines of text. Entrances of these two texts elide in each of the voice parts. The second section (B, measures forty-three through seventy-three), separated from the first section by a four measure orchestral interlude, treats the third and fourth motifs similarly to the way the first two motifs are treated in the A section. The final section (C, measures seventy-six through 134) combines all four motifs. The length of this section (fifty-eight measures) is the sum of the length of the first two sections (twenty-seven and thirty-one measures respectively). A one measure grand pause leads into the final four measures, which harmonically outline a plagal cadence. The final three bars could be considered a coda, or "Amen."

There are four motifs based on the four lines of text. The different motifs elide, which makes large formal structure ambiguous. However, there are sections where the orchestra is playing alone (measures one through ten, thirty-nine through forty-two, seventy-four through seventy-five, 135). Each section of the piece

concludes with a homophonic texture and a cadence of some variety (Perfect Authentic Cadence to conclude section A, Half Cadence to conclude section B and a Plagal Cadence to conclude section C). With the three sections and the way that the motif is treated, the form could be called A, B, C, coda.

Text

Isaiah 40:5

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Dies Irae, from Requiem
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
SATB/piano or orchestra
Peters Edition

Composer Background

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria in 1756. His father, Leopold taught him music theory, keyboard technique and violin. At a young age Mozart's father took he and his sister, Maria Anna, on a tour across Europe to play for many of the royal families. Mozart was a prodigy, his earliest composition dating back to 1761, which was also the year of his first performance at Salzburg University. In 1769 Mozart was appointed Konzertmeister by the Bishop of Salzburg. Mozart wanted to leave Salzburg, and was eventually released from his position in 1781. In 1782 he moved to Vienna, married Constanza Weber, and created an outpouring of compositions. Mozart composed up until hours before his early death in 1791.[22]

Composition

Dies Irae is part of Mozart's final composition *Requiem,* which was anonymously commissioned by Count Walsegg –Stuppach as a memorial to his late wife in 1791. Mozart was sick while composing the piece, and passed away before its completion. His pupils, Franz Jakob Freystädtler and Franz Xaver Süssmayr, completed the composition. Freystädtler completed the string and wind parts for the Kyrie fugue days Mozart's death, in time for his requiem mass at St. Michael's Church in Vienna, just five days after his passing.[22] Süssmayr then orchestrated the Sequence and Offertory, as well as composing the Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. The Dies Irae was orchestrasted by Joseph Eybler, who had spent a great deal of time with Mozart just before his death. It is possible that Mozart supervised the orchestration of this movement, which would explain why the orchestration is written directly into Mozart's score.[23]

Historical Perspective

The original *Dies Irae* hymn has been credited to Thomas of Celano. Used in the Offices and Masses for the Dead, the first printed version was in a Lubeck Missal in 1480. The hymn can be found in hymnals from France, Italy and England, but then was found universally after the Council of Trent added it to the Mass in Commemoration of all Faithful Dead. The *Dies Irae* now forms the Sequence sung between the Epistle and the Gospel.[24]

Technical Considerations

Dies Irae requires a full, rich sound. The only dynamic marking is forte at the beginning of the piece. Choirs will need to have a fully supported sound in order to avoid damaging vocal chords.

Instrumental parts for this piece play a key role in its effectiveness. Text painting relies on the instruments as well as the mood of the piece. Understanding the text and the wrath that goes along with the text is imperative. If an orchestra is not available, an organ would be the best choice to substitute the parts.

The conductor will want to pay special attention to measures fifty-seven and fifty-eight as singers enter on the second beat of this measure rather than the first or third as has been seen throughout the rest of the piece. Pointing it out before singing the piece will lead to greater success. Another point of interest would be the tremolos that begin in measure forty-one.

The entire piece should be conducted in four, with strong beat patterns and a low plane to help the choir remember to support their sound. Since the dynamic does not change, the conductor will need to show word stress and phrasing in order to make the piece musical. For example, in the first two measures, make sure that the phrase is leading to "irae" since that is the word for 'wrath,' which should be the emphasis of the phrase.

Stylistic Considerations

Dies Irae is part of the larger *Requiem* Mass, but can be performed as an individual movement as well. It is appropriate to pull particular movements from the full mass to perform, if a choir is not ready or able to perform the piece in its entirety.

Musical Elements

The tessitura is comfortable for this piece, with a few moments that reach the outer limits of the range. The biggest challenge with the tessitura is that the piece has to be sung at a full *Forte* in every part of the range. Showing choirs how to attain the proper support and sound will be important for an authentic performance.

This piece is full of text painting, which the chorus must be made fully aware of. The timpani roll, which accompanies "Dies Irae" or "day of wrath," signifies thunder. The tremolo that begins in the bass line on the word "Tremor" relates to the trembling. "Cuncta stricte discussurus!" "Investigate everything strictly" is much slower and deliberate, as we reflect on our lives and their meaning. All of these moments should be emphasized to the choir in order to fully understand the gravity of the piece.

Form and Structure

The form of this piece does not fit into a standard formal description. Mozart relates the different sections of this piece very closely to the text. The opening line of text is presented homophonically in d minor. The second stanza of text modulates to the relative F major, however Mozart uses extreme chromaticism and counterpoint to obscure the tonality. The second stanza phrase ends in a minor. The first stanza is repeated in the same style and texture but in the minor dominant key of a minor. When the second stanza is restated, Mozart modulates to c minor. However, similar to the F major section, the tonality is quickly obscured. Up to this point, the form would be ABAB, but instead of repeating another stanza of text, Mozart combines the two stanzas. "Quantus tremor est futurus" is stated in the bass with heavy text painting while "Dies iræ! dies illa" is swelled back and forth in the upper voices.

Finally the last line of text, "Cuncta stricte discussurus," is stated with paired voices in the home key of d minor.

Text

Literal Translation:

Dies iræ! dies illa
Day of wrath day of anger

Solvet sæclum in favilla:
Will dissolve world in ashes

Teste David cum Sybilla!
Witness David with Sybil

Quantus tremor est futurus,
What trembling be

Quando judex est venturus,
When judge is come

Cuncta stricte discussurus!
To examine all

Poetic Translation:

Day of wrath, day of anger
Will dissolve the world in ashes
As foretold by David and the sibyl!

How much tremor there will be,
when the judge will come,
investigating everything strictly!

Hear My Prayer

Felix Mendelssohn

SATB, Soprano Solo, Organ or Piano, or Orchestra

Boosey and Co.

Composer Background

Felix Mendelssohn was born on February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany. He died on November 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany. He was considered to be a child prodigy in both composition and musical performance.[25] In his youth, he composed 5 operas and 11 symphonies. His big musical performance was at the age of 9 in Berlin. His compositional region was Germany. He had a very wide range of compositional output, including symphonies, operas, concertos, chamber music, choral works, songs, piano music, and organ music. Mendelssohn was primarily a composer by profession, but he was active in other areas of music as well. He was a prominent keyboard performer, both as a pianist and an organist. He was also a talented conductor. He was renowned by many musicians including other composers of the time. He conducted his own music as well as others. Mendelssohn had a great interest the Baroque time period, and editing music of Bach. He edited a version of Bach's St. Matthew's passion. As an educator, Mendelssohn did not take on many private students, but he did found the Leipzig Conservatoire.[26]

Composition

Hear My Prayer is one of Mendelssohn's large-scale sacred works, written in 1844.[27] The piece was not written for anyone in particular. According to Dennis Shrock in Choral Repertoire, "most of the large-scale sacred works were not commissioned or composed for church performance. Mendelssohn wrote to one of his friends in 1831, 'If I have written several pieces of sacred music, it is because it was a need of mine, the same need one sometimes has to read a certain book, the Bible, for example, or any other, and that book alone can satisfy you."[28] The text was written by William Bartholomew, derived from the biblical Psalm 55. The piece was composed in Germany, but the first public performance took place at Crosby Hall in

London on January 8, 1945.[29] This piece stands alone, and is not part of a larger work.

Historical Perspective

Mendelssohn wrote a total of nine of these sacred works, including *Hear My Prayer*. It is written for soprano soloist, SATB chorus, and orchestral accompaniment including a pair of oboes, pair of clarinets, pair of bassoons, pair of horns, timpani and strings. The accompaniment part is also reduced for keyboards, organ or piano. This make-up is consistent with his other sacred works, many of which comprise a soloist or group of soloists, chorus, and instrumental accompaniment.

Technical Considerations

This piece would be easier to rehearse if the soloist and accompanist had a strong handle on how the structure of the piece works, so that the rehearsal can be spent incorporating the soloist with the chorus and accompaniment. The whole work alternates between soloist and accompaniment and solo with chorus and accompaniment. The piece starts with a four pattern, andante tempo. There are many opportunities for musical phrasing and conducting since it is only the soloist and accompaniment. The text changes to "the enemy shouteth" and with this change comes a new meter and a new mode. E minor harmony prevails, the tempo changes from andante to allegro moderato, and the meter is a fast three-eight. The conductor may beat a fast three pattern, or eventually go into a one pattern. Considerations for beat pattern in this section include chorus entrances, as well as the pace of the piece. Following the three-eight section, there is a recitative in the solo, with very long, held notes in the accompaniment. While this is written in common time, the conducting style can reflect the shape of the phrase more each specific beat. The piece remains in common time for the remainder, alternating between soloist, and soloist with chorus.

Stylistic considerations

This piece, based on text from the biblical Psalm 55, relates music and affect to the text very well. The soloist starts with the text plea, "Hear my Prayer." When the text shifts to "The enemy shouteth," the mode changes to minor mode, and the tempo increases speed. Related to the text, the chorus enters and echoes the soloist at a forte volume. This reinforces the shouting from the text. "O God, hear my cry" is sung first by the soloist, and then repeated numerous times throughout the close of the three-eight section, until finally the momentum slows to blocked chord accompaniment and a recitative in the solo. Overall, the style of the chorus echoes and mimics the style of the soloist. There are no large formal sections that chorus starts before the soloist, so she will set the tone. At times the texture is homophonic, while at other times, imitative. This gives great variety to the performers and appeals to the audience with musical interest.

Musical examples

Mendelssohn starts *Hear My Prayer* in the key of G Major, and while the piece does modulate to other tonal centers, they are related to G Major. In the first formal section, the singer presents two phrases in G Major, one phrase in g minor, and finished again in G major. Mixing between a major key and the parallel minor key is typical of the Romantic time period. There are occasional accidentals, but most can be explained with secondary harmonic functions. The second formal section starts in the relative E minor and remains in E minor for the majority of the section. As the section closes, the harmony starts to develop and transition to a more tonally ambiguous recitative section. Eventually Mendelssohn ends on a D major chord, signifying V of the original G major. The final formal section stays in G major and E minor, two key areas that have been previously used. The final cadence is a perfect authentic cadence in G Major. There are differences in texture throughout this large-scale work. At first, there is solo voice with accompaniment. When the chorus enters, they are homophonic, and imitate the soloist. As the section progresses, the choir entrances become more polyphonic, and imitative within parts of the chorus, not just the soloist. The tempo of the piece follows an ABA structure, starting

andante, transitioning to allegro moderato, and finishing andante again. This allows for teachable moments with respect to tempo in unity and variety.

Form and structure

Hear My Prayer has four major formal sections, with varying keys, tempi, and especially texture. The first formal section, from the beginning until the three-eight meter change, is written for soloist and accompaniment. The accompaniment part can be with orchestra, or keyboard reduction. Within this part, the soloist has four vocal phrases in an (a a b a) phrase structure. The b phrase is g minor, while the a phrases are in G major. The chorus punctuates this section at the final cadence. The next large section is in triple meter, allegro moderato, and moves to E minor. The chorus is much more involved in this section of the work. The chorus responds to the soloist in both rhythm and style. First, the texture is homophonic, and then choir has entrances that are more imitative. This powerful, albeit brief, section leads to the most ambiguous formal section of the piece. The accompaniment simplifies and holds out sustained chords, supporting a recitative in the solo voice. Similar to the first section, the chorus transitions the piece to the fourth and final section. This closing movement is the most similar to the opening movement, which unifies the piece as a whole. It is in common time and back to an andante tempo. The accompaniment is involved in the piece the entire time.

Text

Hear my prayer, O God, incline Thine ear!
Thyself from my petition do not hide.
Take heed to me! Hear how in prayer I mourn to Thee,
Without Thee all is dark, I have no guide.
The enemy shouteth, the godless come fast!
Iniquity, hatred, upon me they cast!
The wicked oppress me, Ah where shall I fly?
Perplexed and bewildered, O God, hear my cry!
My heart is sorely pained within my breast,
my soul with deathly terror is oppressed,
trembling and fearfulness upon me fall,
with horror overwhelmed, Lord, hear me call!

O for the wings, for the wings of a dove!
Far away, far away would I rove!
In the wilderness build me a nest,
and remain there forever at rest.

A Jubilant Song
Norman Dello Joio (1913-2008)
SATB divisi/piano
G. Schirmer, Inc., 9580

Composer background

Norman Dello Joio was born in New York in 1913 to a musical family. Dello Joio began taking piano lessons from his father, an Italian church organist, at the age of four, and studied organ with his godfather, organists Pietro Alessandro Yon. He began his professional musical career at fourteen when he became the church organists and choir director at the Star of the Sea Church in New York.[30]

Dello Joio studied composition with Bernard Wagenaar at Julliard, and with Paul Hindemith at Tanglewood and Yale. He was the music director for the Dance Players Company before teaching composition at Sarah Lawrence College, Mannes College of Music, and finally Boston University.[31]

Throughout his career, Dello Joio won many awards for his compositions including numerous Guggenheim fellowships, the New York Music Critics' Circle Award, a Pulitzer Prize and an Emmy Award.[32] The composer passed away in his sleep in 2008.

Composition

A Jubilant Song, written in 1945, is an adaptation of Walt Whitman's "A Song of Joys" from *Leaves of Grass.* The work was originally written for women's voices and piano, but was later adapted by the composer for SATB voices.[33] *A Jubilant Song* was composed for a high school choir in New York.[34] Throughout the piece, there is evidence of the composer's jazz influence. Growing up in the 1920's jazz was an exciting basis for a truly American style of music. While Dello Joio never seriously considered making jazz the basis for his compositions, he was influenced it's spontaneity.[35] The syncopation and jazzy rhythm influence can be found throughout this piece, beginning with the piano accompaniment in measure six. The choice of meter alone lends itself to jazz tendencies. Another influence that can be noticed

throughout this piece, and Dello Joio's entire career, is that of his composition teacher Paul Hindemith. Hindemith is credited with having the most powerful influence in the clarification of Dello Joio's style and sense of artistic direction, specifically when he questioned why the composer did not let his natural lyric bent assert itself spontaneously and without fear. Following this question, the composer began to realize how conventional the idea was that contemporary style needed to be difficult, that a good composer is necessarily misunderstood, and that the audience is automatically hostile or unsympathetic.[36] That sense of freedom and lyricism can be found in the rhythmic vigor of this piece, the vibrant text setting, and the rigorous and sometimes bombastic nature of the dynamic contrast. The celebratory mood of the piece reflects the American morale in the post World War II era.

Historical Perspective

This piece was written as World War II was coming to an end, and is one of the earlier twentieth century choral works. The piece reflects that energy and morale. The country was relieved and even thrilled to be coming out of the war. The text of this piece speaks volumes to the jubilation and overall demeanor of the country. *A Jubilant Song* can be used as a wonderful teaching tool and conversation piece for this time in American history. The piece is a staple in the contemporary repertory as it is one of the earliest of the twentieth century.

Technical Considerations

This is a challenging piece due to the various extremes that are reached. The choir will sing with accompaniment, *a capella,* extremes in tempo, and extremes in dynamics. The text should be a driving force for the piece, as the composer has set the text beautifully to highlight the score. Take time before singing the piece to highlight important words, and phrasing concepts. Pointing out moments of text painting will aid in a choir's understanding of the piece.

The meter changes frequently, and there are difficult rhythmic patterns and entrances that need to be clean. Counting and careful attention to the director will

lead to a successful performance. Before rehearsing, decide on what patterns will be used for the measures in five. The word stress and rhythmic patterns alternate between three plus two verses two plus three. Make sure that these are clearly defined in the conducting score. Three two bars will most likely want to be conducted in six so that the quarter note remains steady.

One should consider both the unison parts as well as the non-unison parts. Many of the unison melodies are difficult to blend because of vowel sound or difficult to execute because of diction. The non-unison parts are not always diatonic to a certain key. Special attention will be required with harmonic intervals between parts.

There is a soprano solo, which will require a wide range, strength in high tessitura and breath support. Underneath the solo, the remaining singers accompany on a hum. Make sure singers keep space between their back teeth. If necessary, consider changing this to an open 'n.'

Stylistic Considerations

The text of the poem is highlighted by the rhythmic and dynamic contrast of the piece. Drastic contrast between sections is necessary to differentiate the legato sections from the driving sections. The piece is conducive to a full size mature chorus. A strong high school group would be capable of performing this piece as long as they have been taught strong breath support and technique.

Musical Elements

The dynamic scheme in this piece is extreme and complicated. Dynamics are not unison across voice parts at all times, so the choir needs to be prepared and mark their scores clearly. For example, beginning at measure forty-four, the tenors and basses are getting softer, approaching a piano while the altos enter at a forte. The "darts like lightning" section continues in this fashion, which creates the illusion of lightning striking across the choir.

The key signature itself does not change at all throughout the piece, but instead includes written in accidentals and modulation. There are moments of

tonality, however there are twentieth century chords in play and the tonalities are brief and often changing. The beginning centers around E major. "It Darts like lightening" shifts to b minor before heading back to E major for "Listen to a Jubilant Song." The shift to minor in the lightning section is seemingly a text painting choice by the composer. Beginning at measure seventy-three, the tonal center shifts to C Major. Measure eighty-eight and throughout the "prophetic joys" section, it feels like the piece moves to D major, before finishing in E major, beginning at measure 127. While none of these would be considered absolute modulations, it gives the opportunity to find a tonal center throughout the piece, especially if solfeggio is used to teach the parts.

Tempi are clearly marked by the composer, and should be followed carefully. The changes are drastic, and should be practiced so that transitions are smooth. Have the choir watch the conducting pattern once to understand the concept of the transition. Next, speak through the transitional passages so that they can focus on rhythm rather than melody. Once this goes well, add the vocal lines. The timbre of the piece changes just as drastically. The *forte* and accented moments need to be strong and bright, while the calm section at measure eighty-eight needs to be much more relaxed, subdued and contemplative.

The tessitura is mostly comfortable in this piece, with a few moments that are high for all vocal parts. The soprano part sits the highest of any vocal parts, and should be carefully considered.

Form and Structure

Measures one through thirty-seven - Introduction

- Starts with piano alone changing from a moderate common time to a highly rhythmic five-eight meter.
- Singers enter at measure fourteen with long, sustained exclamations of O!

Measures thirty-eight through eighty-seven – A Section

- Measures thirty-eight to forty-seven are *a capella*. The first lines of text "Listen to a jubilant song, O! Listen to a jubilant song. The joy of our spirit is uncaged" are set homophonically. "It darts like lightning" is set with a

call and response polyphonic texture. Dello Joio alternates between these two styles of texture throughout this A section.

Measures eighty-eight through 107 – B Section

- This section, marked *Calm*, greatly contrasts the opening A section.
- The piano plays along for the first three measures with a connected ascending accompaniment. The choir enters *a capella* with the next line of text "We sing prophetic joys, we sing of lofty ideals. We sing a universal love awakening in the hearts of men." Legato singing offers a drastic contrast to the first section of the piece.
- In measure ninety-seven the choir sings a hum as an accompaniment for a soprano solo. This solo and choral accompaniment are *a capella*
- Measures 104-107 transition to the next large formal section with the text "O! to have life a poem of new joys." The meter changes to three-four and the tempo accelerates until it is twice as fast.

Measures 108-172(end) – C Section

- This section starts when the tempo reaches *Twice as Fast* in measure 108.
- The piano accompaniment changes styles again, this time with repetitive notes followed by a strong ostinato figure. During these, the choir sings "to shout to dance, exult, to shout and leap, to dance and exult, shout and leap. O! to realize space and flying clouds. O! to realize space, the sun and moon, O! To be rulers of life, O! To be rulers of destiny." The texture is similar to the A section with call and response and homophony.
- The opening text of "Listen to a jubilant song" returns. This section has different melodic material than the A section but the accented and rhythmic style of the melody and accompaniment is similar.
- The final statement of the melody is elongated in the choral parts while the piano accompaniment stays rhythmically active until the end.

While the melodies and themes are through composed, this piece follows an ABA structure in terms of tempo and style. One will need a good pianist to perform this piece. The piano accompaniment is virtuosic in nature and is the driving force

behind the piece. Rehearsal with the accompanist before rehearsing with the choir would be helpful so that communication is clear, and rehearsal is effective.

Text

O! O! O! O!
Listen to a jubilant song,
O! Listen to a jubilant song—
The joy of our spirit is uncaged
it darts like lightning!
My soul, it darts like lightning!

Listen to a jubilant song,
For we sing to the joys of youth,
and the joy of a glad light—
beaming day.
Listen to a jubilant song,
For we sing to the joys of
life and youth,
and the joy of a glad light—
beaming day.

O! Our spirit sings a jubilant song
that is to life full of music,
a life full of concord, of music,
a life full of harmony,

We sing prophetic joys of lofty ideals.
We sing universal love awaking
in the hearts of men.

O! To have life a poem of new joys!
To shout! To dance, exult,
to shout and leap.
O! To realize space and flying clouds.
O! To realize space, the sun and moon.
O! To be rulers of life,
O! To be rulers of destiny.

O! Listen to a song, a jubilant song!
Listen our song!
The joy of our spirit is uncaged.
We dance, exult, shout and leap!
O! Listen to our song! O!

Wedding Cantata

Daniel Pinkham

SATB divisi, Piano/Organ and optional Horns, Celesta, Strings

C.F. Peters Corp.

Composer Background

Daniel Pinkham was an American composer, born in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1923. At the age of five, he began playing the piano and composing. Beginning in 1937 he had organ and harmony lessons with C. Pfatteicher at Phillips Academy.[37] Pinkham's education continued at Harvard University from 1940 to 1944 where he studied with A.T. Merritt, A.T. Davison, Piston and Copland. Further studies were with Arthur Honeggar and Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and with Paul Hindemith, Samuel Barber, and Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center.[38] Pinkham held teaching positions at the Boston Conservatory of Music, Simmons College in Boston, the University of Boston, Dartington Hall and Harvard.[39] In 1958 he became music director of King's Chapel, Boston and in 1959 he joined the faculty of the New England Conservatory as a lecturer in music history, theory, composition and the harpsichord, later establishing and chairing the department of early music performance.

Daniel Pinkham was not only a respected composer, but also a noted harpsichordist and a champion of early music.[40] Among his numerous awards are a Fulbright scholarship (1950), a Ford Foundation grant (1962), an American Academy of Arts and Sciences Prize and five honorary doctorates.[41]

Composition

Wedding Cantata was composed in 1956 for mixed chorus and instruments, and was dedicated to his friends Lotje and Arthur Loeb.[42] The text comes from the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs), specifically Song of Songs 2:10-12; 6:1-3 (Movement I – Rise Up, My Love), Song of Songs 8:7 (Movement II – Many Waters) Song of Songs 4:16 (Movement III – Awake, O North Wind) and Song of Songs 8:6 (Movement IV – Epilogue: Set Me as a Seal).

Historical Perspective

Early in his career, Pinkham demonstrated an affinity for choral writing.[43] *Wedding Cantata* was one of the first choral works that he composed. Much like this piece, approximately one-third of the choral works that Pinkham wrote were extended multi-movement compositions set to sacred texts.[44]

Technical Considerations

In the first movement, the conductor will need to mark the beat patterns clearly. The piece begins in six-four, but can be conducted in two. In measure thirty-five, the piano has a great deal of room for interpretation. One possibility is to rehearse with the accompanist ahead of time, and then give them freedom throughout this section without conducting. Beginning in measure forty-five, start conducting in two with a three plus two pattern. Again in measure forty-seven, the two pattern from the start of the piece can resume. Measure fifty-nine is in six, but should be conducted in three, as well as measures sixty-two and sixty-three. The nine-four bar should be conducted in three, and the ending bars of twelve-four could be conducted in two patterns of three. The later three movements are all quite obvious concerning conducting patterns.

Each of the movements is starkly different from the previous. They must be rehearsed separately in order to capture the essence of each.

Stylistic Considerations

Individual movements could be performed without performing the entire work, although a complete performance is ideal.

Musical Elements

The tessitura is comfortable for this piece. The more difficult aspect of this piece is the harmony. The piano accompaniment features bright, closely voiced harmonies, generally arranged with added seventh or ninth tones, rather characteristic of Pinkham who enjoyed the use of pantonality.[45]

There is some beautiful text painting throughout the piece. For example, In the first movement, the text "Rise up, my love" is sung with rising intervals of a perfect fourth followed by a perfect fifth. The second movement is very *legato* and repetitive, which depicts the text 'many waters cannot quench love.'

The dynamic contrast is clearly marked in the score and is quite drastic. The choir may need to mark their score to remember each of the dynamic changes. The first movement in particular includes a wide range in contrast, varying from *pianissimo* to *forte*. The second movement is a general *crescendo* from beginning to end, as the verse is repeated The third movement is rather bombastic and loud, which works well with the innuendo insinuated with the text. The final movement is more subdued and while it grows to *forte*, the texture is much more subtle and gentle all the way through to the final 'amen' of the prayer.

Form and Structure

While each of the movements is very different from one another, Pinkham creates a cohesive piece. The first and fourth movements are written in a chorale-style, although the harmony does not follow what would be considered a traditional chorale. It is interesting to notice that the harmonic progression at the end of the fourth movement can also be in the first movement at the conclusion of the first section. The second and third movements are set canonically, which is a vast difference from the other two movements.

Text

I. Rise Up, My Love

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
For, lo! The winter is past andt eh rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time for the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.
Wither is my beloved gone,
O thou fairest among women?
Wither is thy beloved turned aside?
That we may seek him with thee.
My beloved is gone down into his garden,

To the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens,
And to gather lilies,
I am my beloved's and he is mine
My beloved is mine.

I. Many Waters

Many waters cannot quench love.

II. Awake, O North Wind

Awake, O north wind;
and come though south;
Blow upon my garden, that the spices may flow out,
Let my beloved come into his garden,
And eat his pleasant fruits.

III. Epilogue: Set me as a Seal

Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
as a seal upon thine arm:
For love is strong.
Amen

Rejoice in the Lamb, *Nimrod*
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
SATB Chorus, Organ
Hal Leonard Corporation

Composer Background

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft, England on November 22, 1913. His father was a dentist, and his mother was a pianist and singer. She supported Britten's musical endeavors from a very young age. In fact, she claimed that Britten would be the fourth "B" (referring to Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms).[46] As a child, Britten studied piano and viola, and also composed music. In fact, he composed over 100 pieces by the age of 14. For two years, he attended public school, and studied composition with Frank Bridge. He quickly changed from public school to the Royal College of Music. There he studied with famous English composer John Ireland. While Britten composed for many different mediums throughout his career, his early focus was a cappella choral music. Two noted works from this period of his compositions are *A Hymn to the Virgin* and *A Boy Was Born*.

In the early 1930's, Britten worked for the BBC and composed film scores. Many of his composition, not just his film scores, were acclaimed by the BBC, and premiered through the company. It was during this time that Britten met two important figures in his life, both professionally and personally. The first is poet W.H. Auden, with whom Britten collaborated for the remainder of his career. The second is the tenor Peter Pears. He not only collaborated with him professionally, but Britten and Pears were life partners.[47]

In 1973, Britten suffered a stroke while undergoing heart surgery on a weak valve. From this point until his death in 1976, Britten's health and mobility declined greatly. Britten was revered by the British country, and was given their highest honor, a Life Peer. He was titled Barron Britten of Aldeburgh.[48]

Composition

Rejoice in the Lamb is one of the first two important choral works that Britten wrote.[49] The other is *Ceremony of Carols*. Both of these pieces were written after Britten took a two-year trip to America. Rejoice in the Lamb was dedicated to the Rev. Walter Hussey and the choir of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the consecration of their church, September 21, 1943.[50] Both Hussey and Britten shared the notion that there was a strong connection between God and music. Britten happily accepted the commission to write for the joyous church occasion.

Britten chose portions of the poem of the same title by Christopher Smart. In the words of Hans Redlich, "Britten showcases his amazing ability to find musical equivalence for the most intractable words."[51] Britten uses the theme of seeing God in all things, and rejoicing. This message is easy to recognize, however, aspects of the poem make it difficult to find unity and cohesion. Redlich's quote is appropriate to this piece because Britten is able to pull certain excerpts from the poem, and unify it to fit his work. The disjunction in the poem could be due the fact that Smart wrote it while confined to an asylum. Britten furthers connects the piece by often using the intervals of a perfect fourth, and major second.[52] While this piece is very

popular with audiences, critics have not acclaimed it the same way that other works of Britten's are.

Technical Considerations

The biggest difficulty with this section of the work, is the meter changes and rhythm. It is important to remember that the eighth note pulse remains steady. The conductor will need to prepare and practice this score extensively to truly understand the rhythm and transitions between meters. Mark the score with exact beat patterns. For example, the beginning of the piece is in seven-eight, which should be conducted in three as two plus two plus three. The composer graciously shows where the group of three should be felt by splitting the measure with a dotted line, but the conductor needs to clearly mark that, as the music goes by very quickly. The bar of eleven eight should be conducted in five (down, in, out, out, up) because the words 'him' and 'that' are both quarter notes and accented and that can clearly be dictated with this pattern.

To rehearse this piece, begin by speaking the text under tempo. The entire piece is homophonic, so unison, spoken rehearsal is plausible. Have students pat the steady eighth note pulse in order to help them internalize that steady beat.

Another rehearsal suggestion would be to explain the various characters mentioned in this piece so that singers have a better understanding of whom they are singing about. One option would be to have singers research characters on their own or present one or two to the choir. Often, it is helpful to have singers be involved in the process to really take ownership of the piece.

Stylistic Considerations

This piece is very centered around text, and is rather declamatory in style. Clear diction will be imperative for this performance, but it should not be overbearing.

Musical Elements

The dynamic structure follows the antecedent and consequent phrases. The antecedent, which is introducing a character, is marked *fortissimo* before there is a *decrescendo* leading into the consequent phrase. The second phrase is marked *pianissimo* as the choir sings about the actions of each character. The only moment that the phrases really stray from this scheme is in measures thirty through thirty two where the composer uses text painting on the word 'dance.' The melismatic runs are a rare moment where the text is not set syllabically in order to let the phrase truly dance as the text suggests.

The piece is set in F major, with moments of modulation to B flat major beginning at rehearsal seven. The tessitura is very comfortable for all voice parts. The consequent phrases are unison in order to put more of an emphasis on the text which goes by very quickly. The antecedent phrases sometimes have harmony, which for the most part are very sing-able. One moment of which to be aware is the pick-up to thirty-seven in the alto line. The sixth is difficult to find, and singers can often find themselves singing the tenor's F rather than their A.

Form and Structure

The entire piece is centered around variations on the first two measures of singing, answered by the second two measures of singing. These antecedent and consequence phrases introduce each of the characters of the poem, followed by their actions in the bible. The melodic content of the antecedent phrases is similar, but there are alterations in pitch, duration (including meter), and rhythm to make each character fit the phrase. The consequent phrases all follow the same contour with a different number of syllables depending on the text. For instance, compare measures five and six, to measures ten and eleven. The measures begin the exact same way, but the composer altered the second half of measure ten based on the number of syllables in the text.

Text

Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter,
Bind a leopard to the alter and consecrate his spear to the Lord.
Let Ishmail dedicate a Tyger,
And give praise for the liberty in which the Lord has let him at large.
Let Balaam appear with an Ass,
And bless the Lord his people
And his creatures for a reward eternal.
Let Daniel come forth with a Lion,
And praise God with all his might through faith in Christ Jesus.
Let Ithamar minister with a Chamois,
And bless the name of Him that cloatheth the naked.
Let Jakim with the Satyr
Bless God in the dance,
Let David bless with the bear
the beginning of victory to the Lord the

Sure on This Shining Night
Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)
SATB divisi/piano
Songs of Peer, Ltd.

Composer Background

Morten Lauridsen is a 21st century contemporary American composer born in Colfax, Washington in 1943 and raised in Portland, Oregon. He studied at Whitman College and the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, where he also taught composition for more than 30 years.[53] In speaking of Dr. Lauridsen's sacred works in his book, *Choral Music in the 20th Century*, musicologist and conductor Nick Strimple describes Dr. Lauridsen as "the only American composer in history who can be called a mystic, (whose) probing, serene work contains an elusive and indefinable ingredient which leaves the impression that all the questions have been answered... From 1993 [Dr.] Lauridsen's music rapidly increased in international popularity, and by century's end he had eclipsed Randall Thompson as the most frequently performed American choral composer."[54] Lauridsen's works include eight vocal cycles, art songs, instrumental works and a series of sacred motets.[55] He was named an "American Choral Master" by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2005 and received the 2007 National Medal of Arts. This award is the highest artistic award in the United States. It was awarded by the President in a White House ceremony "for his composition of radiant choral works combining musical beauty, power, and spiritual depth.[56]

Composition

Composed in the United States, *Sure on this Shining Night* was originally written as the third movement for *Nocturnes*, a choral cycle on poems by Rilke, Neruda and Agee. Lauridsen set the verse much like a song from the American musical theater stage. The piece was commissioned for the 2005 convention of the American Choral

Directors Association, and premiered by the Donald Brinegar Singers and Morten Lauridsen on piano.[57]

The composer goes on to explain that the first three movements of the choral cycle, *Nocturnes – S Nuit d'Été* (R.M. Rilke), *Soneto de la Noche* (Pablo Neruda) and *Sure On This Shining Night* – may be performed either separately or as a cycle (in that order and including the *Elipogue*). The *Epilogue: Voici le soir*, is only to be performed if the entire cycle is done, following *Sure On This Shining Night.* In that case, the composer explains that the final chord of *Sure On This Shining Night* is held with a fermata and then the chorus begins the *Epilogue* without a break between the two movements.[58]

The text for the piece comes from James Agee's first published collection of poetry, *Permit Me Voyage* (1934). *Sure on This Shining Night*, evokes both the tenderness and the expansiveness of the universe beheld in the summer night sky by a lone wanderer.[59]

Technical Considerations

The text itself seems to evoke three emotions, need, hope and despair. The first phrase of the poem sets such a beautiful scene of sitting outside, admiring the night sky, but still contemplating life on "this side the ground." The need for kindness to be present in life is apparent. The second phrase brings about feelings of hope. "The late year lies down the North" seems to be a perspective on time, and the realization that time will continue on with or without us. In the grand scheme of life, our troubles and sufferings may be minor (All is healed, all is health), but for this one perfect moment, time is suspended, and we are filled with hope for the future (High summer holds the earth. Hearts all whole). The final phrase takes a rather drastic turn toward despair. It is interesting that Agee begins with a restatement of the phrase "Sure on this shining night" but eventually rephrases the original second line. The phrase "Of star made shadows round" is restructured to "Of shadows on the stars" which has a more solitary tone, including less of the sense of hope, and more a

sense of despair as reality sets in that we do not in fact know what the future holds. "I weep for wonder wand'ring far alone" is truly a feeling of being alone in our wandering thoughts, concerned about what the future may have in store. What a fast emotional rollercoaster in such a short poem.

The poem begins so calmly, and has the feeling of hope in the middle and again calms down with the feeling of despair. That concept is mirrored in Lauridsen's setting of the text. The piece begins very calmly and quietly, gradually building to a forte before drastically calming down to portray the despair more quietly than the piece began. The tone of the piece also changes significantly on the words "I weep for wonder wand'ring far alone of shadows on the stars." You can feel the desperation as the music includes a *ritardando*, forcing the listener to contemplate the text. The text is also highlighted through the expansion of the melodic range. The highest note of the piece is an A flat, which is sung by the sopranos during the climax of the piece on the word "shining." The piece begins and ends with much more narrow melodic lines, which are in the lower ranges of the singers, mimicking the tone of the poem.

Lauridsen sets his version of the text in the key of D-flat. Through his compositional style, he is able to illuminate the message of the text, particularly the feeling of hope, even in the midst of despair. Agee uses alliteration as a poetic device in his poem, for example, sure, shining, and shadows, or weep, wonder, and wandering. Lauridsen mirrors that effect through use of repeated melody and phrasing.[60]

Strimple explains that in Lauridsen's later works, "melodies have two easily identifiable characteristics: they are built from motives that can be isolated for contrapuntal development, and the inherent harmonic implications are limited to only two or three chords. Of these, at least one will be a pure triad and one will include the interval of a second or fourth."[61] This is clearly the case for this piece. *Sure on this Shining Night* is set with SATB singing and piano accompaniment. Throughout the piece, many voices are paired in duets while presenting the melody. The texture is primarily homophonic. Once the text is completely stated, the first

stanza repeats and the texture changes to imitative entrances. The piece ends with soft, fully orchestrated chords, until the piano closes the piece with a D flat Major chord. The overall choral style is legato, with smooth connected vocal lines and beautiful counterpoint. The poignant text is highlighted through moments of text painting. There are numerous statements of "shining" where the composer uses melismas to highlight the word before going to a single tone for the word "night." Also noteworthy is the descending leap on the words "lies down" followed by the ascending passage for "All is healed." Simple compositional techniques create a stunning experience for the singer and listener alike.

The conductor needs to be aware of the *rubato* necessary throughout the piece. Use the text to guide the interpretation. The beat patterns vary between two, three and four, with moments of subdivision as necessary to clarify the *rubato.*

Stylistic Considerations

The composer has taken great care in outlining exactly what he wants out of the piece. Careful score study is necessary in order to remain true to those concepts. Some breaths will need to be clarified in order to maintain the integrity of the phrases. Special attention should be paid to both dynamic and tempi changes which are nicely marked, but still need to be rehearsed ahead of time in order to solidify ones own interpretation.

Musical Elements

The piece is set in D Flat major and stays true to that key. In fact, there is not a single accidental found in the piece other than in the key signature. This would be a great piece to sing with solfeggio because modulations would not need to be outlined.

Measure forty-eight is marked *ppp*. This may need to be trimmed to just a few singers, with more singers joining halfway through the phrase, and then the entire section joining on beat four of measure fifty-one. Speaking through the *rubato* would help to keep everyone together before notes are added. Moments of *ritardando* and fermata will need to be rehearsed extensively. Rehearsal E begins very exposed for the bases and sopranos. The conductor will need to provide extra support and encouragement for those entrances.

There are moments throughout the piece that are on the outer parts of vocal ranges. These moments do not last for very long, but need to be carefully prepared and properly supported.

Form and Structure

There are not large formal sections in this piece. Instead, it is unified by text and rhythm. The accompaniment often includes a steady eighth note pulse, unless it has traded that rhythm with the choir. This pulse grounds the piece and keeps it moving along. While the accompaniment is not terribly difficult in terms of notes and rhythms, the accompanist will need to be very aware of the conductor's interpretation of the piece in order to follow tempo changes and *rubato* or *ritardando*.

Text

Sure on this shining night
Of starmade shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night

I weep for wonder
Wand'ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

The Last Words of David
Randall Thompson (1899-1984)
SATB/piano
E.C. Schirmer Music Co.

Composer Background

Randall Thompson was born in 1899 in New York City. He attended the Lawrenceville School, a private school in New Jersey. Thompson started studying at Harvard in 1916, and then studied at the American Academy in Rome from 1922 until 1925 thanks to the prestigious Prix de Rome award. In 1927, he was appointed organist and lecturer at Wellesley College. He traveled across the United States from 1931 until 1934 as part of a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship where he was observing music education programs. He taught at a variety of prestigious institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley, Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Princeton University, and Harvard University. He became known in the latter part of his life as the "Dean of American Choral Composers."[62] With a choral output that consists of twenty-seven works and sets of pieces, He is considered to be one of the most significant American choral composers of the twentieth century. Thompson died in 1984.

Composition

Thompson's compositions are recognized by the composers' diatonic style, expressively supple melodies, idiomatic vocal writing, occasional fleeting dissonance resulting from natural clashes in the linear counterpoint, pronounced sensitivity to words, frequent modal harmonies and well-timed climaxes.[63]
The Last Words of David was commissioned in 1949 by Serge Koussivitsky in honor of his twenty-fifth anniversary with the Boston Symphony. The piece is for four-part mixed choir with orchestral or piano accompaniment. The text is from 2 Samuel 23:3-4, which the composer interestingly found in a hotel room Gideon Bible during one of his many cross-country trips while writing *College Music*.[64]

The biblical text of the piece allows *The Last Words of David* to be performed in either a concert or church setting effectively.

Historical Perspective

This piece has become a staple in the choral repertory. Every choir should be familiar with the works of Randall Thompson. *The Last Words of David* is one of the most performed of his works. The piece would be appropriate for a strong high school choir, and a great piece for a festival or honors choir.

Technical Considerations

The time signature remains in four-four throughout the entire piece, and the conducting gesture should do the same, although that gesture should vary drastically in size and shape. The beginning is marked fortissimo and should include a large, strong, dominant gesture, beginning with the piano downbeat. This opening should also include weight until the *sfz p* in measure twelve. At this point, the texture of the piece changes radically and should be much more prayerful and light. These types of alterations in texture, weight, and dynamics happen relentlessly throughout the piece. The conductor should spend a great deal of time preparing all of these changes in order to be clear for the choir.

The composer went to great lengths to paint the words with appropriate music, which needs to be highly considered when preparing the piece, both for the conductor and the chorus. The text should be paramount while learning the piece. Use the text to guide the direction of the phrase, and the reason for the dynamic contrast.

Stylistic Considerations

A mature choir, with a strong understanding of support and technique, should perform this piece. There are many moments that could be harmful to vocal chords if not treated properly. For instance, the sixth measure is marked *sffz p cresc.* This technique needs to be carefully taught ad executed. The extremes in dynamics can be taxing, and need to be carefully monitored.

Musical Elements

The Last Words of David is divided into three sections. The first section is in D major, although the key signature says G major. The second section is developmental with tendency tones and tension resolution for many different chords, which do not really establish in a central key. The Alleluias finally lead to the marked key of G major. The conductor should have a clear understanding of these changes.

This piece reaches the higher, although still accessible, ends of vocal ranges, especially on drastic dynamic markings. Make sure that the sound it developed and supported properly. One example of these extremes is measures six through eight. All voice parts other than the alto are sitting in the upper part of their range and sustain those notes for seven and a half beats before reaching even higher in the range in the next measure.

The composer went to great lengths to clarify cut offs, with notes tied to eighth notes to indicate that the cut off should happen on the beat. This should be clarified to the choir ahead of time.

The text was deliberately set to the music. The beginning is strong and vibrant, expressing that God does in face "ruleth over men." The *marcato* indicated in measure eight, rehearsal one established the "fear of God" which then softens nicely in measure twelve. The ascending patterns beginning at rehearsal three highlight the idea of the sun rising in the morning. Rehearsal five descends just like the rain. All of these concepts and many others can be brought to the singers' attention in order to be as effective as possible with the performance.

Form and Structure

When analyzing the form of the piece, there seem to be three rather distinct sections. The beginning through rehearsal two can be seen as the first. This section, while the key signature says G major, is actually in D major. These first twelve measures are used to capture the audience's attention in what could be considered a fanfare, stating the first verse of the text.

The second section calms down drastically. Rehearsal two through six never establishes a central key. The text is much more calm and the music follows that. This is the moment where the listener can hear more of the contemporary chords. This is a beautiful contrast to the opening section.

The final part of the piece begins at rehearsal six and concludes the piece. For the first time, the texture is imitative rather than homophonic. The harmony finally lands on the written key of G major, and the piece ends in a very prayerful way. The accompaniment for *The Last Words of David* includes many very fast scalar passages, and intricate rhythm contrasted with full chords on quarter notes. The accompaniment needs to mirror the contrast that is created in the choir.

Text

2 Samuel 23:3-4

He that ruleth over me must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain, Alleluia. Amen.

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The University of the Arts,
Wernersville Campus

presents

A Spring Choral Concert

Featuring the

University Choir

Mrs. Sarah McGrory, conductor

Thursday, May 28, 2016
8:00 pm
Trinity Lutheran Church, Robesonia, PA

Concert Program

O Magnum Mysterium
Tomás Luis De Victoria(1548-1611)

And the Glory of the Lord
George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

Dies Irae — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Hear My Prayer — Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Margeaux Katz, Soprano

Intermission

A Jubilant Song — Norman Dello Joio (1913-2008)
Alicia Wyler, soprano

Wedding Cantata — Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006)

I. Rise Up, My Love
II. Many Waters
III. Awake, O North Wind
IV. Epilogue: Set me as a Seal

Timothy Gonzalez, Margeaux Katz violin
Sarah Hawk, viola
Ashley Flanagan, cello

Rejoice in the Lamb, Nimrod
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Sure on this Shining Night — Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

The Last Words of David
Randall Thompson (1899-1984)

The University of the Arts, Wernersville Campus Chamber Choir

Amanda Aulicino
Tierney Ayers
Ira Barth
Sarah Childress
Jared Edmiston
Ashley Flanagan
Margaret Frost
Brian Gilbert
David Ginn
Judith Goltz
Timothy Gonzalez
Sarah Hawk
Margeaux Katz
Miranda Killian
Laurea Lapp
Peter Lazorcik
Colin McGrory
Blake Mosser
Lauren Mulholland
Zachary Nyce
Jamie Roach
Victoria Scalfaro
Sarah Weiser
Phillip Weiser
Alicia Wyler
Jeremy Zimmer

Personnel:
Mrs. Sarah McGrory, conductor
Mrs. Diana Cook, pianist
Dr. Marcos Krieger, organist
Blake Mosser, choir manager
Timothy Gonzalez, violin
Margeaux Katz, violin
Sarah Hawk, viola
Ashley Flannagan, cello
Peter Lazorcik, percussion
Phillip Weiser, percussion
Jeremy Zimmer, percussion