

Doug McConnell: Selected Choral Works

The Lockless Door (2019)

Heidelberg graduate Ben Lupo commissioned this work for his a cappella choir at Bryan High School in Bryan, Ohio. Ben was one of those students who lived for a challenge and I knew that his choirs would be trained the same way. He suggested the Robert Frost poem that is the basis for this piece. *The Lockless Door* is based on a childhood memory of the poet; it portrays a tale that is atmospheric and a bit bizarre! What (or who) is behind the lockless door? The narrator is afraid of finding out and does what he can to avoid reality.

At times, the poem suggests a touch of Edgar Allan Poe, another famous American writer. The setting is influenced by both of these artists, a dark, dramatic presentation for a poem that invites the imagination. My thanks to Ben and the wonderful students of Bryan High School, who premiered this work in March, 2020 at a local school concert. It was my pleasure to work with them on this piece and attend the performance.

This Little Light of Mine (2018)

SATB Chorus, piano. A setting of the well-known gospel song originally written in the 1920s by Harry Dixon Roes. This piece was written in memory of Robert Overholt, a well-known and well-loved member of the Tiffin, Ohio community, at the request of his family. While we originally looked at a number of texts to honor Bob's life, we settled on this traditional song, as it seemed to best represent Bob's positive spirit and good humor.

This Little Light uses a theme and variations approach which gave me the opportunity to set a number of stanzas that are not associated with this song. The next texts were written by my good friend Lynn Huenemann, also in honor of Bob Overholt. Some of the stanzas show the clear influence of popular music, blues and early rock in particular. Other stanzas present a much more classical approach. Singers: get ready to swing eighth notes in one stanza, switch back to regular eighth notes in the following stanza; this is part of the fun!

This Day of Being (2018)

SATB, unaccompanied, some divisi. This is a choral piece for a college-level choral ensemble; it was composed to honor my good friend and colleague Bill Reyer, upon his retirement from the Department of English at Heidelberg University. Bill's wonderful talents as a poet have inspired two choral pieces and five songs now in my compositional portfolio; this is the latest addition in what we both hope is a growing canon.

Dr. Reyer's eloquent poem speaks of a number of life's pleasures, exquisite and ordinary at the same time. Reading a good book, helping an elderly friend through a meal, walking on a dirt road, folding a laundry load on a silent afternoon.....each particular moment receives its own loving musical reflection, sometimes calm and comforting, and (in one case,) humorous. A brief quote of the famous *Ash Grove* tune (an additional pleasure, courtesy of the Welsh) appears in both the beginning and end of this composition, as an important point of reference.

O Mistress Mine (2017)

SATB, unaccompanied. After all of these years, my first work inspired by the words of Shakespeare.... I am hardly the first composer to take on this famous passage from *Twelfth Night*, but who can resist the text's exuberance and its fanciful invitation to experience the delights of true love? The tempo is brisk and the textures vary in service of Shakespeare's invitations. The music builds to a passionate expression of the key phrase: "Kiss me!" From there, a very active, polyphonically driven coda drives this piece to its final exclamation.

Blessed are the People (1981; revised 2017)

This anthem, for two-part choir, flute and organ was written to mark the 150th anniversary of Salem United Church of Christ, in Cincinnati, Ohio. A friend mentioned the need for new two-part anthems, encouraging me to revisit this

ancient piece. This new version has been revised significantly, but the essential essence of the piece remains. Text: Selected lines from Psalm 1 in the Old Testament.

***Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* (2016)**

SATB Chorus, organ. This is an anthem for advanced church choir or college ensemble, based on the well-known hymn. The text for this setting is a composite of several different Protestant hymnals. The piece works as a theme and variations; each stanza offers its own distinctive setting. The anthem was written in celebration of the ordination of Pastor Jodi Nicholson Keith, to be performed for the first time in October, 2016.

***Pied Beauty* (2014)**

SATB Chorus, Solo French Horn, piano. Commissioned by Dr. Gary Packwood, Director of Choral Activities, for the Mississippi State University Chorale. This setting of a famous poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins is a lively celebration of God the Creator. The French horn part is featured prominently throughout the work, and is playable by a college-level performer.

***Great Spirit Come.....* (2012)**

From *The Trinity Suite*, for trumpet/flugelhorn and organ. This movement, taken from a larger three-movement suite, can be performed as a single work. It features the use of choral voices who are asked to perform in various groupings within the audience. The size of the choir may vary, from 20 voices (recommended minimum) to a larger group of singers. Two

vocal soloists are also used, and are placed in various places in the performance space. Light percussion (2 – 4 triangle players) are also involved. The movement uses prominent motives from the traditional Southern hymn tune *Prospect*, with choral text taken from the traditional hymn, *The Lone Wild Bird*.

***Lord, Make Me An Instrument* (2011)**

SATB Chorus, piano. Written for a choral composition competition, one which solicited new choral settings of the famous *Prayer to St. Francis* text. It did not win the competition, but you may benefit from sponsoring a premiere performance! This setting uses the ancient Phrygian mode as a point of departure.

***I'm Nobody! Three Songs of Emily* (2010-15)**

I'm Nobody! (2015)

Hope is the Thing with Feathers (2010) *A Little East of Jordan* (2010)

SATB Chorus, piano. Commissioned by Dr. Stanley Wold, Music Director, The Arrowhead Chorale, Duluth Minnesota. Premiere performances on three subscription concerts, March 2010. Texts by Emily Dickinson.

I'm Nobody! (2015) This movement was composed at a later date to complete this trio of choral pieces. Humor and an eccentric waltz/scherzo style introduce the listener to the charming, unassuming world of Ms. Dickinson.

Hope is the Thing with Feathers captures the Ms. Dickinson's gentle musings on the nature of hope itself. Both the choral parts and the piano incorporate melodic fragments from the traditional Irish folk tune, *Slane*, which some audiences associate with the hymn text *Lord of All Hopefulness*, as well as *Be Thou My Vision*.

A Little East of Jordan is a more lively and rambunctious rendering of a Dickinson text, one that tells the story of Jacob wrestling with God. This is the latest of several choral pieces that I have written that chronicle various "encounters with God." (See *Elijah and the Raven*, *Zacchaeus*, below for additional examples).

***Elijah and the Raven* (2008)**

SATB chorus, a cappella. Commissioned by Dr. Grant Cook III, for the Heidelberg Concert Choir, for their European tour, Spring, 2008. This challenging work for advanced singers is based on a poem by Heidelberg University poet Dr. William Reyer. The poem is inspired by various texts from the Old Testament, describing Elijah's ascent to meet with the face of the great "I Am." The musical setting builds on a succession of lush harmonies, leading to a powerful climax.

***O God Our Help in Ages Past* (2007)**

SATB chorus, a cappella. Written for and dedicated to the Heidelberg College-Community Chorus, this setting uses each of the stanzas associated with this famous hymn tune to create a series of variations.

***Set Me as a Seal* (2004)**

SATB chorus, a cappella, with solo flute. Premiered by the College-Community Chorus, Heidelberg College, April 2004. Subsequent performance by the Heidelberg Concert Choir, 2005 Spring tour. This piece is a new version of work that was originally written for soprano and flute.

Cast in a simple ternary form, the piece features the use of a famous text from the *Song of Solomon*, one that reminds the reader of the power of love, a force that is as "strong as death."

***Ballads of Grace* (2001)**

SATB chorus, a cappella. *No Room* also features a tenor soloist. Both pieces were written during the same year, each one based on a poem by the English hymn writer Fred Pratt Green. Each one was premiered by a different choral ensemble.

Zacchaeus tells the story of the encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament. The musical setting, objective at times, but bold in others, builds harmonic tension as the encounter between these two men nears. The final section reflects on the coming death of Christ. Melodic fragments from the Lenten hymn, *What Wondrous Love is This?* are used as musical commentary as the piece concludes. Premiered by the Heidelberg Concert Choir, commissioned by Dr. Grant Cook III, with performances on tour, including a regional ACDA conference.

No Room: "There's no room on the ark for donkeys!" This statement is refuted in Green's powerful poem, reminding the reader that there is room on the ark for such an animal, and also room for the humblest of servants to serve God. The musical setting uses a jazz/blues format at times to underline the humor of the text, but also the important Lenten message that is presented in the second half of the work. This piece was premiered by the Lancaster Chorale in 2003.

***Nu sculon herigean* (1999)**

SATB Chorus, soprano solo, organ. Commissioned by Tamara Makdad Albrecht and St. Bede's Episcopal Church, Atlanta, GA, for their organ dedication concert. Premiere: March 2000. This work uses the text for *Caedmon's Hymn*, an ancient hymn of praise to God the Creator. The setting uses the original Old English language, which is largely presented by the solo soprano. The choral parts function as a modern English "translation" of the older text. The English hymn tune *Deo Gracias* is used throughout the anthem as a commentary. The tune appears in fragments throughout most of the work, with one complete presentation of the tune at the anthem's climax.

***Psalm 103 (Bless the Lord, O my Soul)* (1998)**

SATB chorus, a cappella. Commissioned by the Mississippi Music Teachers Association for their annual state convention. The premiere performance was provided by the Millsaps Chamber Singers, Dr. Timothy Coker, director. This setting uses three movements to set the well-known text from the Book of Psalms. There is considerable use of divisi to provide the work's Neo-Romantic flavor; a work for advanced college singers.

***A Message from Paul* (1997)**

Double-chorus, a cappella. Commissioned by John Williams, Director of Choral Activities, Waldorf College, Forest City, Iowa. 1998. Recorded on the choir's 1998 CD release. This challenging work for double chorus is based on a famous text from the *Book of Colossians* from the New Testament, a favorite text of director John Williams, one of my mentors.

***Dying at My Music!* (1992)**

SATB chorus (4-8 parts), flute choir, piano. Commissioned by the Lambda Phi Chapter, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, MSU. Premiered April 1992. Based on two poems by Emily Dickinson, with some use of extended vocal technique for the choral singers. The piece is challenging, but clearly within the reach of college-level singers.

***Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair* (1989)**

Arrangement of a song by Stephen Foster for SATB chorus, a cappella. Commissioned by John Williams for the Bridges of Song International Choral Festival, Tallinn, Estonia. First American performance by the South Bend Chamber Singers, South Bend, Indiana, March 1990. Estonian premiere at the Bridges of Song Festival, July, 1991. Published by Hinshaw Press.

***Magnificat/Nunc dimittis* (1991)**

Unison / 2-part choir. Commissioned by Steven Hauser, director, Old Lyme Boy's Choir, Old Lyme, Connecticut. Premiered May 1991.

***Live Always in this Knowing* (1990)**

SATB chorus, organ. Commissioned by Dr. Richard Benedum for the Dayton Bach Society, Dayton, Ohio. Premiered March 1990.

***Absolute and Nothing* (1989)**

SATB chorus, flute, viola, soprano and tenor soloists, piano. Commissioned by the congregation of St. John's Unitarian Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, in honor of their 175th anniversary. Premiered November 1989.

***Shenandoah* (1989)**

Male chorus, a cappella. Commissioned by John Williams for the State Academic Male Chorus of Estonia, 1989 American tour. Performances included Orchestra Hall, Chicago; Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.; Carnegie Hall, New York City.

***The War Prayer* (1989)**

Narrators, Mixed chorus, piano, percussion ensemble. Commissioned by the Music Department, University of Dayton, for the New Music Festival. Premiered January 1989. Other recent performance: MSU Faculty Artist Series, January 1996, Heidelberg College- Community Chorus, April, 2004; Arrowhead Chorale, Duluth, MN, 2010.

This 15-minute dramatic piece is based on an anti-war fable written by Mark Twain. The score was designed for performance by high-school or college-level singers, with percussion parts that do not

require advanced players. One narrator tells Twain's dramatic tale, while a second reader plays the role of the Old Man, a soul who comes to a small town to warn the populace of the deadly dangers of war.

Antigone/Creon (1987)

Male chorus, orchestra. Doctoral dissertation.

Songs of Celebration (1986)

Soprano, SATB chorus, string quartet, organ. Commissioned by Steven Hauser for the choir of St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Old Lyme, Connecticut. Premiered June, 1986. Most recent performance: Heidelberg University, April 2008.

What Sweeter Music (1984)

SATB chorus, organ. Commissioned by Dr. John Leman for the May Festival Chorus, Cincinnati, Ohio. Premiered December, 1984.

Look to this Day! (1987)

SATB Chorus, piano. The text is attributed to Kalidasa, a poet/dramatist from ca. 400 B.C.E., urging the reader to look to the future with anticipation. Written for a select group of singers from Princeton High School in Cincinnati Ohio, the setting employs a number of rhythmic and metrical challenges in providing a lively setting of an ancient poem. Honorable mention: Roger Wagner International Choral Competition. Published by Gentry Press.

For online introduction, please go to:

<http://www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.do?itemid=8739827&lid=0&keywords=Look%20to%20this%20Day&searchcategory=00&subsiteid=32&>

Annabel Lee (1984)

Male Chorus, piano. Commissioned by Dr. Stanley Wold for the CCM Men's Ensemble. Premiered June, 1984. Recent performances include the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Arrowhead Chorale, Duluth MN. Score Revised, 2014.

Monotone (1983)

SATB Chorus, piano. This short work, cast in a ternary form, is based on a simple but striking poem by Carl Sandburg, one that extols the beauty that the "monotone" that the rain provides, before moving on to other noteworthy images. The music uses a somewhat Impressionistic musical style, one that relies on repetition and simplicity.

Christmas Joy (1980)

Mixed chorus, baritone solo, orchestra. Performances by Indianapolis Symphony and Chorus (December, 1981) and Cincinnati May Festival Chorus, with piano reduction score (1980, 1982, 1983).