

Choral Works of John Muehleisen

Hope

for a *cappella* SSA Choir
(with occasional div.)

Music by
John Muehleisen

Poem by
Emily Dickinson
(1830–1886)

*Commissioned by Seattle Girls' Choir,
Jacob Winkler, Artistic Director
to celebrate their 30th Anniversary Season*

Hope

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I've heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Program Notes

I'm delighted to have been asked to compose a work for *Prime Voci*—the advanced high-school ensemble of Seattle Girls' Choir (SGC)—to help celebrate the 30th Anniversary of this great organization. To compose a work for *Prime Voci* is a particular joy for me because of my long history with this ensemble, which dates back to 1998, when I composed a work titled *The King of Glory* for Opus 7 Vocal Ensemble and SGC's *Prime Voci*. The next year I composed *The Wise and the Foolish* for the same two ensembles. During these collaborations I also had the pleasure of working with Dr. Jerome Wright during the rehearsal process. Finally, in 2012, *Prime Voci* participated in the premiere of a 90-minute oratorio commissioned by Choral Arts titled *Pietà*. As I thought back to 1998, I realized that, in light of this 30th Anniversary season, I have had an association with SGC and with *Prime Voci* for 15 years, fully half the life of the organization.

Regarding *Hope*, when Jake Winkler and I first met to discuss the commission, I asked him what ideas he had in mind for the piece. He provided me with a wonderful bit of inspiration by asking that the piece embody one of the aspects of the mission of Seattle Girls' Choir: the empowerment of young women as they enter adulthood. He explained that SGC works to instill the qualities of self-reliance, effectiveness, excellence, accountability, and discipline in the singers as part of their overall singing experience. The theme of making the transition into adulthood became my guiding light as I searched for a text, and I was particularly drawn to the notion of composing a work based on an inspirational text that these talented young women could take with them into adulthood and that would aid them throughout their lives. As has happened so often when searching for a text, I ultimately found it in the work of one of the female poets of the Victorian era, in this case the recluse American poet Emily Dickinson, whose *Hope is the thing with feathers* is one of her most beloved and well-known poems. Upon reading the first few lines of the poem, I knew I had found the message I wanted to share with the women of *Prime Voci*: one of the most powerful things that helps us through life's challenges is hope. In the three brief stanzas of Dickinson's poem, she manages to communicate the profound message that, no matter our struggles and challenges, hope is always there, it "never stops at all." It is with us through the gale and the storm, it keeps us warm "in the chilliest land" and "on the strangest sea." And most of all, that "little bird" of hope never asks anything of us in return, even in the most extreme situations. All we need do is hold hope fast in our hearts and deep in our souls, and it will sustain us through life's challenges.

In order to reflect Dickinson's theme of the constancy of hope, I chose a musical structure in which the same basic music is used for each stanza, reflecting that sense of the steadfastness nature of hope. Despite some musical variations in the second and third stanzas, which reflect the text in each stanza, the music representing hope is still recognizable throughout. Following the last line of the third stanza, the music reaches a point of repose—a calm in the storm—as the sopranos sing the words “sweetest Hope,” while the altos remind us that hope “never asked a crumb of me.” After this three-fold statement of “sweetest Hope,” the opening text and music return to remind us that hope “never stops at all,” and the work closes with one last statement of “sweetest Hope.” One final point about the music: there is something of a musical “Easter egg” in this piece, a hidden surprise that one might not detect unless one is in on the secret: the threefold rising musical theme at the beginning of the piece is similar to the opening musical material sung by the treble voices in *The King of Glory*, the first piece I composed for *Prime Voci*. What a joy it has been to work with these talented young singers for over 15 years now.

Hope

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Jacob Winkler, Artistic Director
to celebrate their 30th-Anniversary Season

Poem by: Emily Dickinson

Music by: John Muehleisen
2013

Andante speranza ♩ = 86

mf

Soprano 1
Hope _____ Hope _____ "Hope" _____

Soprano 2
Hope _____ Hope _____ "Hope" _____

Alto
Hope _____ Hope _____ "Hope" _____

S 1
— is the thing with feath-ers — That perch-es in the soul —

S 2
— thing with feath - ers — That perch-es in the soul —

A
— thing with feath - - - ers — That perch-es in the soul —

S 1
— And sings the tune with - out — the words — Ah

S 2
— And — sings the tune with - out the words — Ah

A
— And — sings the tune with - out the words — Ah

25 *f* *p* *accel.* -----

S1 And nev - er stops - at

S2 And nev - er stops - at

A And nev - er stops - at

33 *f*

S1 all - And nev - er stops - at all - stops - nev - er

S2 all - And nev - er stops - at all - nev - er at all - nev - er

A all - And nev - er stops - at all - nev - er

40 *Agitato* ♩ = 150 (♩ = 50) *f* *mf* *mf*

S1 And sweet - est - in the Gale - is heard - And

S2 stops - at Ah Ah

A stops - at Ah Ah

49

S1 *mf*
sore must be the storm - That could a -

S2 *f* *mf*
Ah That could a -

A *f* *mf*
Ah That could a -

57

S1 *f* *mf*
bash the lit - tle Bird That kept so man - y

S2 *f* *mf*
bash the lit - tle Bird That kept so

A *f* *mf*
bash the lit - tle Bird the lit - tle Bird That kept so

65

S1 *p*
warm - so man - y warm - kept so man - y warm -

S2 *p*
man - y warm - kept so man - y warm -

A *p*
man - y so man - y warm - kept so man - y warm -

73

S1 *p* *mf* *p* *p*
kept so man - y warm - Ah

S2 *p* *mf* *p* *p*
kept so man - y warm - Ah

A *p* *mf* *p* *p*
kept so man - y warm - Ah

80

S1 *mf* *p* *mf* *p*
Ah Ah

S2 *mf* *p* *mf* *p*
Ah Ah

A *mf* *p* *mf* *p*
Ah Ah

88

S1

S2 *mp* *p*

A

Adagio desolato ♩ = 74

96 *p*

S1 I've heard _____ it _____ in the chill - est land - _____ And

S2 *p* *mp* *p*
I've heard _____ heard it chill - est land - _____ chill-est land - _____ And

A *p* *mp* *p*
I've heard _____ heard it _____ chill - est land - in the chill-est land - _____ And

105 *mp* *p* *accel.* *mf* *f*

S1 on the stran-gest Sea - _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet,

S2 *mp* *p* *mf* *f*
on the stran - gest Sea - _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet,

A *mp* *p* *mf* *f*
on the stran-gest Sea - _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet, nev - er, _____ Yet,

113 *a tempo* *p*

S1 nev - er, in _____ Ex - trem - i - ty, _____ It asked a crumb - of Me. _____

S2 *p*
nev - er, in _____ Ex - trem - i - ty, _____ It asked a crumb - of Me. _____

A *p*
nev - er, in _____ Ex - trem - i - ty, _____ It asked a crumb - of Me. _____

121 *p*

S1 — sweet - est Hope — sweet - est

S2 — sweet - est Hope — sweet - est

A — nev-er, asked a crumb - of Me.

129

S1 Hope — sweet - est Hope

S2 Hope — sweet - est Hope — sweet -

A nev-er, asked a crumb - of Me. sweet - est Hope

137 *rall.* *pp* *G.P.* *Andante gioioso* ♩ = 96 *mf* *f*

S1 — "Hope" — is the thing with feath-ers -

S2 est Hope "Hope" "Hope" "Hope" is the thing with feath -

A — "Hope" "Hope" "Hope" is the thing with feath -

145

S1 *f* That perch - es in the soul - *mf* And sings the

S2 *f* - ers - That perch - es in the soul - *mf* And sings the

A *f* - - ers - That perch - es in the soul - *mf* And sings the

153

S1 *f* tune with - out the words *mf* Ah *f*

S2 *f* tune with - out the words *mf* Ah *f*

A *f* tune with - out the words *mf* Ah *f*

161

S1 *mf* *mp* *mf* And nev - er stops - at all - And nev - er

S2 *mf* *mp* *mf* And nev - er stops - at all - And nev - er

A *mf* *mp* *mf* And nev - er stops - at all - And nev - er

accel.

169

f

S1 stops - at all - And nev - er stops - at all -

S2 stops - at all - And nev - er stops - at all -

A stops - at all - And nev - er stops - at all -

Adagio tranquillo ♩ = 60

176

p *mf* *p* *pp*

S1 sweet - sweet - est Hope

S2 sweet - - - est Hope

A sweet - - - sweet - est Hope