

River Moons

#2 from *Two River Nocturnes*
for SATB Choir (*divisi*)

Music by
John Muehleisen

Text by
Carl Sandburg

*Commissioned for the Choral Arts Ensemble (Rochester, Minnesota),
Michael Culloton, Artistic Director by the CAE Commissioning Club*

*Dedicated to my father, Gene Muehleisen,
who taught me to appreciate the sacramental beauty of Nature*

Publication Note: The first of the *Two River Nocturnes*, titled "Prairie Waters by Night," is also available from Muehleisen Music, Catalog No. JM 117 (www.johnmuehleisen.com)

River Moons

The double moon, one on the high backdrop of the west, one on the curve of the river face,

The sky moon of fire and the river moon of water, I am taking these home in a basket, hung on an elbow, such a teeny weeny elbow, in my head.

I saw them last night, a cradle moon, two horns of a moon, such an early hopeful moon, such a child's moon for all young hearts to make a picture of.

The river—I remember this like a picture—the river was the upper twist of a written question mark.

I know now it takes many many years to write a river, a twist of water asking a question.

And white stars moved when the moon moved, and one red star kept burning, and the Big Dipper was almost overhead.

Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)
from *Smoke and Steel*. 1920

Performance Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, when the women or men are divided in three parts (SSA, SAA, TTB, or TBB), divide the voices evenly between the three-parts. Three-part divisi that should be performed as distributed amongst the voices is noted as “div. as written.”
2. The first of the *Two River Nocturnes* is titled “Prairie Waters by Night” and is currently available from the composer (Catalog #117), pending publication by Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Inc.

Program Note

River Moons was commissioned in 2005 by the Choral Arts Ensemble of Rochester, Minnesota for a concert of works entitled *A Word's Worth*, featuring choral settings of texts by a variety of English-language poets, including Dickinson, Blake, Tennyson, Whitman, Bridges, and Shakespeare. The work was premiered in May 2006.

When CAE Artistic Director Michael Culloton approached me about this commission and told me about the theme of the concert, I immediately turned to Carl Sandburg, whose *Prairie Waters by Night* I had set on a commission from The Dale Warland Singers in 2003, the world premiere of which Michael had heard in 2004. I had for some time considered writing several companion pieces for *Prairie Waters by Night* that would constitute a short suite of “Prairie” Nocturnes based around the theme of water.

As with *Prairie Waters by Night*, I was struck by the beauty of the colorful language that Sandburg uses to describe various images of nature (“double moon, ““sky moon of fire,” “river moon of water,” “it takes many many years to write a river”). Sandburg’s poem takes a simple image of the moon reflected in the water of a river and turns it into a vivid memory from one’s youth, full of the nostalgia, mystery, and wonder that youthful memories invoke so powerfully, all of which I tried to capture in the musical language of the work.

Both poems (*Prairie Waters by Night* and *River Moons*) invoke a sense of memory: “The river—I remember this like a picture...” and “...sheer waters showing the russet of old stones remembering many rains.” Because they are intended to be companion pieces and because they share similar images, I wanted to establish a musical connection between the texts, which I did in several places in *River Moons*, particularly in the following passages, which are musically related to passages in *Prairie Waters by Night*.

“The sky moon of fire and the river moon of water, I am taking these home in a basket hung on an elbow,...”

“The river—I remember this like a picture—the river was the upper twist of a question mark...”

The music makes frequent use of antiphonal passages between the women and the men, the former representing the “sky moon” and the latter representing the “river moon.” As with most of my choral works, there is ample use of text painting; however, in *River Moons* I sought primarily to invoke the emotional content of the memory and wonder that Sandburg so wonderfully paints with his poem.

River Moons is dedicated to my father, Gene Muehleisen, who, as the dedication reads, “taught me to appreciate the sacramental beauty of Nature.” His long and eminent career in law enforcement was framed by service as a seasonal ranger in Yosemite National Park, a place of wonder and grandeur that he taught me to appreciate and to love. On the numerous trips that he and I took together throughout Western America and Europe and in the arboretum near his home that he so lovingly tended for more than 25 years, he passed on to me his love of Nature, teaching me that it is the echo of a loving Creator, the handwriting of God writ upon the earth, and a connection with a God who is beyond understanding, yet who can be known through the grand, as well as the intimate beauty of his creation. In four days from now, on Dec. 28, 2005, he will celebrate his 90th birthday, and this work is in part a birthday present and a thank you card to him.

John Muehleisen
Lynnwood, WA
Dec. 24, 2005

River Moons

Commissioned for the Choral Arts Ensemble (Rochester, Minnesota),
Michael Culloton, Artistic Director by the CAE Commissioning Club

Dedicated to my father, Gene Muehleisen,
who taught me to appreciate the sacramental beauty of Nature

Carl Sandburg

John Muehleisen (2005)

Adagio tranquilo ♩ = 54

Sopranos
Riv-er Moons Oo

Altos
Riv-er Moons Oo

Tenor
Moons Oo

Bass
Moons Oo

*Piano

* for rehearsal only

NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, three-way splits in the women's or men's voices should be evenly distributed amongst the voices. This applies to all of the following: SSA, SAA, TTB, TBB.

6 *mf* 7 *p* 8 9 *p* 10 *mf* > *p* 11 12 *p*

S Riv - er Moons Ah Riv - er

A Riv - er Moons Ah Riv - er

T 8 Moons Ah Riv - er

B Moons Ah Riv - er

Pno. 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

mf *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

* NOTE: Bring out Tenor 1 line

13 *f* sub. 14 *non dim* 15 16 17

S Moons The dou - ble moon, Ah

A Moons The dou - ble moon, Ah

T 8 Moons The dou - ble moon, Ah

B Moons The dou - ble moon, Ah

Pno. 13 14 15 16 17

f *Con moto* = 69

* NOTE: Do not use 3-part divisi here.
All sopranos should sing the melody.

18 *f* 19 20 21 22

S one on the high back-drop of the west, ———

mf A1: one on the high back - drop of the west, ———

A2: one on the high back - drop of the west, ——— T1: one on the curve. ———

f T2: one on the curve. ———

mf B one on the curve. ———

18 19 20 21 22

Pno. *mf*

23 24 25 26 27 28

S ——— The sky moon of fire ———

A ——— The sky moon of fire ———

of the riv - er face, *molto cresc.* *ff* and the riv - er moon of

T ——— of the riv - er face, ——— and the riv - er moon of

B ——— of the riv - er face, ——— and the riv - er moon of

23 24 25 26 27 28

Pno. *ff*

29 30 *mf poco marcato* 31 *f* 32 *p sub.* 33 *mf* 34 *mp*

S I am tak-ing these home in a bas-ket hung on an

A I am tak-ing these home in a bas-ket hung on an

T wa-ter, I am tak-ing these home in a bas-ket hung on an

B wa-ter, I am tak-ing these home in a bas-ket hung on an

Pno.

35 *mf* *p* 36 *mf sub.* 37 *legato* 38 *non dim* 39 *mp* 40

S el - bow, such a tee - ny wee - ny el - bow, in my head.

A el - bow, such a tee - ny wee - ny el - bow, in my head.

T el - bow, a tee - ny wee - ny el - bow, in my head.

B el - bow, a tee - ny wee - ny el - bow, in my head.

Pno.

* NOTE: Emphasize Ab, Gb, F, Eb in Tenor 2

41 42 *mp* 43 44 45 46

S I saw them last night, a cra - dle moon,

A I saw them last night, a cra - dle moon,

T I saw them last night, a cra - dle moon,

B I saw them last night, a cra - dle moon,

Pno.

47 *mf* 48 *mp* 49 *p* 50 51 52 *mf*

S two horns of a moon, such an ear-ly hope-ful moon, such a child's—

A two horns of a moon, such an ear-ly hope-ful moon, such a child's

T two horns of a moon, such an ear-ly hope-ful moon, such a child's

B two horns of a moon, such an ear-ly hope-ful moon, such a child's

Pno.

* NOTE: Emphasize Soprano melody through m. 57

53 54 55 56 57 *ff* 58 *mf*

S moon for all young hearts to make a pic-ture of. The

A moon for all young hearts to make a pic-ture of. The

T moon for all young hearts to make a pic-ture of. The

B moon for all young hearts to make a pic-ture of. The

Pno.

59 60 *p* *mf* 61 62 63

S riv - er— I re - mem-ber this like a pic-ture—

A riv - er— I re - mem-ber this like a pic-ture— the

T riv - er—

B riv - er— I re - mem-ber

Pno.

64 *mp* 65 66 67 *mp* 68 *mf*

S was the up-per twist a writ-ten ques - tion mark.

A riv-er of a ques-tion mark.

T the riv - er

B *mp* *mp* *mf*
the riv-er the riv - er

Pno. *mp* *mf*

69 *mf* 70 71 *f* *Emphasize Soprano 2* 72 73 74 *f*

S I know now it takes man-y years

A *mf* *f*
I know now it takes man-y years

T *f* *f*
man - y years to write a riv - er, —

B *f* *f*
man - y years to write a riv - er, —

Pno. *mf* *f* *f*

75 *f* twist of wa-ter 76 *non dim* 77 78 79 *mf* stagger breathing asking a ques-tion.

A *mf*

T *f* stagger breathing *non dim* *mf* Ah

B *f* stagger breathing *non dim* *mf*

(ah)

Pno. *f* *non dim* *mf*

80 81 *f* 82 *mf* *non dim* 83 84

S Ah

A *f* *mf* *non dim*

T *f* *mf* *non dim*

B *f* *mf* *non dim*

(ah)

Pno. *f* *mf* *non dim*

Adagio tranquillo $\text{♩} = 60$

85 *p* Riv - er 86 *p* Moons 87 88 *p* Ah

S

A

T

B

Pno.

89 *mp* 90 91 *f* 92 *f* 93 *molto legato* 94 *non dim*

S

A

T

B

Pno.

And white stars moved and one red star kept burn - ing, —

And white stars moved and one red star kept burn - ing, —

when the moon moved, and one red star

and one red star

* NOTE: Bring out Tenor 1 line ** Ossia: On beat 4 of this measure (93), alternatively, the Alto 2 and Tenor 1 parts could be switched so that Alto 2 sings the Bb and Tenor 1 sings an Ab.

95 96 *mp* 97 98 99 100

S and the Big Dip - per

A *mp* and the Big Dip - per

T *p* Ah *mp* was al - most *non cresc.*

B *p* Ah *mp* was al - most *non cresc.*

Pno. *p* *mp* *non cresc.*

101 *mp* 102 *non cresc.* 103 104

S was al - most o - ver - head.

A *mp* was al - most o - ver - head.

T o - ver - - - head.

B o - ver - - - head.

Pno. 101 102 103 104

PERUSAL SCORE COPY