

Choral Works of John Muehleisen

That Music Always Round Me

for SATB Choir (divisi)

Music by
John Muehleisen

Text by
Walt Whitman

*Commissioned by the Bellevue Chamber Chorus
in Celebration of their 20th Anniversary Season*

That Music Always Round Me

That music always round me, unceasing, unbeginning,
 yet long untaught I did not hear,
But now the chorus I hear and am elated,
A tenor, strong, ascending with power and health,
 with glad notes of daybreak I hear,
A soprano at intervals sailing buoyantly over the tops of immense waves,
A transparent base shuddering lusciously under and through the universe,
The triumphant tutti, the funeral wailings with sweet flutes and violins,
 all these I fill myself with,
I hear not the volumes of sound merely, I am moved by the exquisite meanings,
I listen to the different voices winding in and out, striving,
 contending with fiery vehemence to excel each other in emotion;
I do not think the performers know themselves –
 but now I think begin to know them.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)
from *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (Book XXX of *Leaves of Grass*)

Performance Notes

SSA, SAA, TTB, and TBB divisi: Unless otherwise indicated, when divisi parts appear in either the soprano or alto voices such that the women's voices divide into a total of three parts (SSA or SAA), do not observe the divisi "literally"; rather, distribute the three parts evenly amongst all of the women's voices. The same principle applies to similar divisi in the men's voices. When the voices divide evenly, observe the divisi as notated (SSAA, TTBB).

John Muehleisen
Lynnwood, WA
March 2004

Program Notes

Full Version

That Music Always Round Me was commissioned by the Bellevue Chamber Chorus in Bellevue Washington in celebration of their 20th Anniversary Season and was premiered on a concert entitled "A New World Choral Tapestry." The text, by Walt Whitman, was originally suggested to me by the group's Director, Dr. Fredrick Lokken. The commission specified a work that would be celebratory in nature preferably to a text that referred to music in some way. I had been familiar with this poem for a number of years, but had always been hesitant to set it because of its overt musical references, which could run the risk of becoming cliché or trite unless very carefully set to music. Even after I had read through the text again and had "lived with it" for a while, I still found myself musically uninspired by it. As a result, I turned to some other texts that did inspire me, which, as it turned out, came up short of meeting the criteria for the commission.

Thankfully Fred encouraged me to take another look at the Whitman text. This time I considered it from a different perspective. Rather than interpreting the text and its musical images so literally, I thought of the poem in the context of two themes that Whitman uses in so many of his works: a kind of cosmic mysticism and the holistic, spiritual connection of the individual to all of humanity and indeed to the whole of the cosmos. This different reading opened the floodgates and immediately the first section of the work took shape.

The opening bars represent "that music" of which Whitman speaks, "unceasing, unbeginning," which at first the poet "did not hear." The poem speaks of a gradual epiphany, a revelation born of the poet's realization of all that surrounds him and of his connection to it, which becomes fully revealed at the text "But now the chorus I hear and am elated." As the opening bars unfold, the textless "music" is gradually punctuated by quiet utterances of "that music," as the poet becomes aware of his surroundings, gradually growing to ecstatic exclamations. The effect is akin to a fog lifting to reveal the bright, shining light of day.

At this point the fast middle section begins with its references to the various members of the "chorus," accompanied by the "music" motive of the opening bars (now transformed), and followed by the "transparent base shuddering lusciously under and through the universe," which is vividly painted by the musical setting. The fast middle section culminates on the text "all these I fill myself with." The final section of the work alternates quiet, introspective passages with louder, more ecstatic music that finally culminates with one final realization on the part of the poet, ending with a final reference to the opening line of the poem.

John Muehleisen
Lynnwood, WA
May 2004

Abridged Version

That Music Always Round Me was commissioned by the Bellevue Chamber Chorus in Bellevue Washington in celebration of their 20th Anniversary Season. The text, by Walt Whitman, was originally suggested to me by the group's Director, Dr. Fredrick Lokken. The commission specified a celebratory work to a text that referred to music in some way. Rather than interpreting the text and its musical images literally, I thought of the poem in the context of two Whitmanesque themes: a kind of cosmic mysticism and the holistic, spiritual connection of the individual to all of humanity and indeed to the whole of the cosmos.

The opening bars represent "that music" of which Whitman speaks, "unceasing, unbeginning," which at first the poet "did not hear." The poem speaks of a gradual epiphany, a revelation born of the poet's realization of all that surrounds him and of his connection to it, which becomes fully revealed at the text "But now the chorus I hear and am elated." As the opening bars unfold, the textless "music" is gradually punctuated by quiet utterances of "that music," as the poet becomes aware of his surroundings, gradually growing to ecstatic exclamations. The effect is akin to a fog lifting to reveal the bright, shining light of day.

At this point the fast middle section begins with its references to the various members of the "chorus," accompanied by the "music" motive of the opening bars (now transformed), and followed by the "transparent base shuddering lusciously under and through the universe," which is vividly painted by the musical setting. The fast middle section culminates on the text "all these I fill myself with." The final section of the work alternates quiet, introspective passages with louder, more ecstatic music that finally culminates with one final realization on the part of the poet, ending with a final reference to the opening line of the poem.

John Muehleisen
Lynnwood, WA
May 2004

That Music Always Round Me

Commissioned by the Bellevue Chamber Chorus
in Celebration of their 20th Anniversary Season

Walt Whitman

John Muehleisen (2004)

Adagio misterioso ♩ = 54

p

Sopranos

Mm

Altos

Mm

Tenor

Mm

Bass

Mm

Adagio misterioso ♩ = 54

p

*Piano

* for rehearsal only

5

S Oo _____ That mu - sic _____ Oh _____

A Oo _____ That mu - sic _____ Oh _____

T 8 _____ That mu - sic _____ Oo _____ That mu - sic _____

B _____ That mu - sic _____ Oo _____ That mu - sic _____

Pno. 5

mp *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

8

S _____ That mu - sic _____ Ah _____ That mu - sic

A _____ That mu - sic _____ Ah _____ That mu - sic

T 8 Oh _____ That mu - sic Ah _____

B Oh _____ That mu - sic Ah _____

Pno. 8

mp *mf* *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *f*

11

S Ah — That mu - sic al - ways round me, un -

A Ah — That mu - sic al - ways round me, un -

T Ah — That mu - sic al - ways round me, un -

B Ah — That mu - sic al - ways round me, un -

Pno.

16

S ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, I did not hear, —

A ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ing, yet long un - taught I did not hear, —

T ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, yet long un - taught I did not hear, —

B ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, yet long un - taught. I did not hear, —

Pno.

21 *accel.* -----

S *p* *molto cresc.* *f*
 But now the cho - rus I hear and am e - lat - ed,

A *p* *molto cresc.* *f*
 But now the cho - rus I hear and am e - lat - ed,

T *p* *molto cresc.* *f*
 But now the cho - rus I hear and am e - lat - ed,

B *p* *molto cresc.* *f*
 But now the cho - rus I hear and am e - lat - ed,

Pno. *p* *molto cresc.* *f*

Allegro giocoso ♩ = 96

25 *mf* *mp*
 S Oo Oh Ah

A *mf* *mp*
 Oo Oh Ah

T *f marcato*
 A ten-or, strong, as - cend - ing with

B *f marcato*
 A ten-or, strong, as - cend - ing with.

Allegro giocoso ♩ = 96

25 *mf* *mp* *f*

Pno.

30 *ff* *f*

S with glad notes of day - break I hear,

A with glad notes of day - break I hear,

T pow - er and health, with glad notes of day - break I hear,

B - pow - er and health, with glad notes of day - break I hear,

Pno.

36 *f marcato* *f marcato* *mp* *mp* *f* *f*

S A so - pran - o at in - ter - vals sail - ing buoy - ant - ly

A A so - pran - o at in - ter - vals sail - ing - buoy - ant - ly

T Ah

B Ah

Pno.

42 *ff*
 S o - ver the tops of im - mense waves,
 A o - ver the tops of im - mense waves,
 T *mf* Ah *ff*
 B *mf* Ah *ff*
 Pno. *mf* *ff*

47 *mf* A trans - par - ent base shud - der - ing lus - cious - ly
 A *p* A trans - par - ent base shud - der - ing lus - cious - ly
 T *p sempre* Ah Ah Ah Ah
 B *p sempre* Ah Ah Ah
 Pno. *mf* *p sempre*

un-der and through the u-ni-verse, _____

un-der and through the u-ni-verse, _____

Ah Ah Ah

Ah Ah Ah

53

Pno.

ff The tri - um - phant tut-ti, _____ *mf* the fu - ner - al wail - ings _____ with sweet flutes and

ff The tri - um - phant tut-ti, _____ *mf* the fu - ner - al wail - ings _____ with sweet flutes and

ff The tri - um - phant tut-ti, _____ the fu - ner - al wail - ings _____

ff The tri - um - phant tut-ti, _____ the fu - ner - al wail - ings _____

59

Pno.

65

S
vi - o - lins, all these I fill my-self with,

A
vi - o - lins, all these I fill my-self with,

T
all these I fill my-self with,

B
all these I fill my-self with,

Pno.

ff

mf

ff

mf

ff

70

S
I hear not the vol-umes of sound mere-ly, I am moved by the ex-qui - site

A
I hear not the vol-umes of sound mere-ly, I am moved by the ex-qui - site

T
I hear not the vol-umes of sound mere-ly, I am moved by the ex-qui - site

B
I hear not the vol-umes of sound mere-ly I am moved by the ex-qui - site

Pno.

Largo ♩ = 48

p

mp

p

mp

p

mp

p

mp

Adagio movendo ♩ = 54

75 *mf*

S mean-ings, I lis-ten to the diff-erent voic-es wind-ing in and out.

A mean-ings, I lis-ten to the diff-erent voic-es wind-ing in and out.

T mean-ings, I lis-ten to the diff-erent voic-es wind-ing and

B mean-ings, I lis-ten to the diff-erent voic-es wind-ing and

Pno. *mf*

79 *f* *mf*

S striv-ing, con-tend-ing with fier-y ve-he-mence to ex-

A striv-ing, con-tend-ing with fier-y ve-he-mence to ex-

T striv-ing, con-tend-ing with fier-y ve-he-mence to ex-

B striv-ing, con-tend-ing with fier-y ve-he-mence to ex-

Pno. *f* *mf*

82 *ff* **Largo** ♩ = 42 *pp* introspectively

S cel_____ each oth - er in e - mo - tion; I do not

A cel_____ each oth - er in e - mo - tion; I do not

T 8 cel_____ each oth - er in e - mo - tion; I do not

B cel_____ each oth - er in e - mo - tion; I do not

Pno. *ff* **Largo** ♩ = 42 *pp*

86 *p* *molto cresc.* *accel. ----- rall. -----*

S think_____ the per-form - ers know them - selves but now I think I be - gin to know

A think_____ the per-form - ers know them - selves but now I think I be - gin to know

T 8 think_____ the per-form - ers know them - selves but now I think I be - gin to know

B think_____ the per-form - ers know them - selves but now I think I be - gin to know

Pno. *p* *molto cresc.* *accel. ----- rall. -----*

Slightly Faster ♩ = 48

91 *ff* them. That *ff* mu - sic *f* al - ways round me, *mf* un -

91 *ff* them. That *ff* mu - sic *f* al - ways round me, *mf* un -

91 *ff* them. That *ff* mu - sic *f* al - ways round me *mf* un -

91 *ff* them. That *ff* mu - sic *f* al - ways round me *mf* un -

Pno. *ff* *ff* *f* *mf*

Slightly Faster ♩ = 48

95 *molto cresc.* ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, *ff* That mus - sic!

95 *molto cresc.* ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, *ff* That mu - sic!

95 *molto cresc.* ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, *ff* That mu - sic!

95 *molto cresc.* ceas - ing, un - be - gin - ning, *ff* That mu - sic!

Pno. *molto cresc.* *ff*