

Program Notes

The three unaccompanied choral pieces that comprise *A Whitman Triptych* were composed between 2012 and 2014. *O Setting Sun* was commissioned by the Madison Chamber Choir, Madison, Wisconsin, Anthony Cao, conductor, and received its premiere performance on April 20, 2012. *What Is the Grass?* was commissioned by Cappella SF, Ragnar Bohlin, conductor, and was premiered on February 6, 2015. *Facing West* was commissioned in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge by the International Orange Chorale, Zane Fiala, conductor, and received its premiere performance on May 27, 2012.

I first set Whitman to music in 1986 when I adapted part of *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed* as the basis for my composition *Invocation and Dance* (Catalog No. 4378). I went on to set *Good-Bye, My Fancy* for male chorus and soprano saxophone in 1992 (Catalog No. 4765). Like so many composers, I have found the visionary quality of Whitman's verse inspiring; the vigor and intensity of the poetry seem naturally to draw out music.

O Setting Sun is based on a text adapted from Walt Whitman's much longer poem *Song at Sunset*. The poem, often described as a "paean," or a song of enthusiastic praise, was first published in 1860 as *Chants Democratic No. 8*, and received its present title in 1867. In Whitman's manuscript, two words were written in the margins: "finale" and "religious." I believe these are clues to the generally reverent and exalted tone of all of Whitman's poetry.

O Setting Sun for baritone solo and SATB chorus unaccompanied is cast in a loose rondo form. The opening musical gesture of stacked imitative entries on the words "O Setting Sun" (and later "We Sing") is repeated several times, with episodic passages separating them. The baritone soloist acts as narrator, singing noble recitatives praising the sun and the hour of its setting, supported by commentaries in the chorus. A central section ("How the earth darts on and on!") is fast and rhythmic with many changing time signatures. After a return of the baritone soloist, the final section's music is both serene and reverent, as "Nature continues, glory continues; O setting sun!"

—David Conte

O Setting Sun

O setting sun!

Splendor of ended day floating and filling me,
Hour prophetic, hour resuming the past,
Inflating my throat, you divine average
You earth and life fill the last ray gleams I sing.

We sing, o setting sun!

Open mouth of my soul uttering gladness,
Eyes of my soul seeing perfection,
To breathe the air,
To speak - to walk - to seize something by the hand!

How the clouds pass silently overhead!
How the earth darts on and on!
How the sun, the moon, the stars, dart on and on!
How the water sings! (Surely it is alive!)
How the trees rise and stand up, with strong trunks, with branches and leaves!
(Surely there is something more in each of the trees, some living soul.)

O setting sun!

O strain musical flowing, through ages and continents, now reaching me,
I take your strong chords, and cheerfully pass them forward.

I too carol the sun,
I too throb to the beauty of the earth,
I too have felt the resistless call of myself.

Nature continues, glory continues,

O setting sun!

—Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

*Commissioned by the Madison Chamber Choir,
Madison, Wisconsin, Anthony Cao, Conductor,
in celebration of its 20th anniversary*

A Whitman Triptych

Walt Whitman (1891–1892)
Song at Sunset
D. C., alt.

David Conte

I. O Setting Sun

for Baritone Solo, SATB Chorus unaccompanied

Andante ♩ = 76 *mp* *mf* *p*

Soprano
O, set - ting sun!

Alto
O, o set - ting sun!

Tenor
O, o set - ting sun!

Bass
O, O set - ting sun!

Keyboard
(for rehearsal only)

mp *mf* *rit.*

7

O set - ting sun, o set - ting

mp *mf*

O, o set - ting sun, o set - ting

mp *mf*

O, o set - ting sun, o set - ting

mp *mf*

O, O set - ting sun, o

rit.

Broader, quasi-recitativo ♩ = 69

12

mf

Bar. Solo Splen - dor of end - ed day float - ing and fill - ing me,

f *pp* *p*

S sun! O

f *pp* *p*

A sun! O

f *pp* *p*

T sun! O

f *pp* *p*

B sun! O

Broader, quasi-recitativo ♩ = 69

17

Hour pro-phet-ic, — hour re-sum-ing the past, — In-flat-ing my throat, —

pp *mp* *p*

sun, o sun, sun, o sun, sun, o sun, sun, o sun,

pp *mp* *p*

pp *mp* *p*

pp *mp* *p*

sun, o sun, sun, o sun,

22

f allarg.

— you di-vine av-er-age, You earth and life_till the last ray gleams — I —

mp *p* *mp* *mf*

o sun, o sun, o sun, o sun,

mp *p* *mp* *mf*

mp *p* *mp* *mf*

mp *p* *mp* *mf*

o sun, o sun, o sun, o sun,

mp *p* *mp* *mf*

allarg.

27 **Tempo I** ♩ = 76

f

sing. _____ I sing, _____

mf We sing _____ we sing _____ O

mf We sing, _____ we sing, _____ O

mf We sing, _____ we sing, _____ O

mf We sing, _____ we sing, _____ O

We sing, _____ we sing, _____

Tempo I ♩ = 76

31 **Broader** ♩ = 63 *rit.* **Larghetto** ♩ = 60

mp

— O set - ting sun, — o set - ting sun! _____

set - ing sun, o set - ting sun! _____ O - pen mouth _____ of my

set - ing sun, o set - ting sun! _____ O - pen mouth _____ of my

set - ting sun, o set - ting sun! _____ O - pen mouth _____ of my

O set - ting sun, o set - ting sun! _____ O - pen mouth of my

Broader ♩ = 63 *rit.* **Larghetto** ♩ = 60

37

S soul ut - ter - ing glad - ness, Eyes _____ of my soul see - ing per -

A soul ut - ter - ing glad - ness, Eyes _____ of my soul see - ing per -

T soul ut - ter - ing glad - ness, Eyes _____ of my soul see - ing per -

B soul ut - ter - ing glad - ness, Eyes of my soul _____ see - ing per -

41

A bit faster ♩ = 66 *mp* *moving forward* *allarg.*

fec - tion, To breathe the air, _____ to speak, _____ to walk, _ to

fec - tion, To breathe the air, _____ to speak, _____ to walk, _ to

fec - tion, To breathe the air, _____ to speak, _____ to walk, _ to

fec - tion, To breathe the air, _____ to speak, _____ to walk, _ to

A bit faster ♩ = 66 *mp* *moving forward* *allarg.*

Majestically ♩ = 56 *rit.*

Larghetto ♩ = 60

rit.

46 *f* *p*

seize some-thing — by the hand! _____

f *mp*

seize some-thing — by the hand! How the clouds pass si-lent-ly ov-er-head! _____

f *mp*

seize some-thing — by the hand! How the clouds pass si-lent-ly ov-er-head! _____

f *p* *mp*

seize some-thing — by the hand! _____ How the

Majestically ♩ = 56 *rit.* Larghetto ♩ = 60 *rit.*

Fast, rhythmic ♩ = 132

(2+2+3)

53 *mp*

How the earth darts on — and

p *mp* *p*

How the earth darts on — and on! _____

p *mp*

How the earth darts on — and

p

earth darts on — and on! _____

Fast, rhythmic ♩ = 132
(2+2+3)

57

p *mp* *p*

on! _____ on_ and on! _____

mp *p* *mp*

_____ On_ and on! _____ How the sun, the moon, _ the

p *p*

on! _____ On_ and on! _____

mp

_____ On_ and on! _ How the sun, the moon, the stars, dart on_ and

61

mp *p* *p*

_____ How the sun, the moon, the stars dart on_ and on! _____

p *p*

stars dart on_ and on, _____ on and on! _____

mp *p*

_____ How the sun, the moon, the stars dart on_ and on! _____

p *mp*

on! _____ On and on! _ How the

65 (3+2+2)

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

How the wa - ter sings, _____

How the wa - ter sings! _____ How the wa - ter

How the wa - ter sings! _____ How the

wa - ter sings! _____ How the wa - ter sings! _____

(3+2+2)

69

mp *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.* *cresc.*

How the wa - ter sings! _____ How the wa - ter sings! _____

sings! _____ How the wa - ter sings! _____

wa - ter sings! _____ How the wa - ter sings! _____

How the wa - ter sings! _____

(2+2+2+3) (3+2+2) (3+3+2)

73

f (Sure-ly it is a - live!) How the trees rise and stand

f (Sure-ly it is a - live!) How the trees rise and stand

f (Sure-ly it is a - live!) How the trees rise and stand

f (Sure-ly it is a - live!) How the trees rise and stand up, with

(2+2+2+3) (3+2+2) (3+3+2)

77

up, with strong trunks, with branch - es and leaves!

up, with strong trunks, with branch - es and leaves!

up, with strong trunks, with branch - es and leaves!

strong trunks, with branch - es and leaves, and leaves!

A bit slower ♩ = 120

81 (3+2+2) *molto rit.*

molto rit.

mp

dim.

Bar. Solo

S (some liv - ing soul.)

(Sure-ly there is some-thing more in each of the trees.)

A

(Sure-ly there is some-thing more in each of the trees.)

T

(Sure-ly there is some-thing more in each of the trees.)

B

(Sure-ly there is some-thing more in each of the trees.)

A bit slower ♩ = 120

(3+2+2)

molto rit.

Tempo I ♩ = 76

(dim.) *p*

O set - ting sun! O

O, o set-ting sun, O

O, o set - ting sun, O

O, o, _____

Tempo I ♩ = 76

92

rit.

Broader, quasi-recitative ♩ = 69

O strain mu-si-cal flow - ing, through
 — set - ting sun, — o set - ting sun!
 o set - ting sun, — o set - ting sun!
 o set - ting sun, — o set - ting sun!
 O set - ting sun, — o — sun!

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

rit.

Broader, quasi-recitative ♩ = 69

ag-es and con-tin-ents, now reach-ing me, I take your strong chords, — and cheer-ful-ly pass them
 O sun,
 O sun,
 O sun,
 O sun,
 O sun,

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

101

for - ward, I too car-ol the sun, I too throbb_ to the
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,

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

Broader ♩ = 63 *ff* *allarg.*

105

beaut-y__ of the earth, I too have felt__ the re - sist-less call__ of my-
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,
 o sun, o sun,

mf *f*
mf *f*
mf *f*
mf *f*

Broader ♩ = 63 *allarg.*

Moderately slow, serene ♩ = 63

109

self. _____

mp Na - ture con - tin - ues, _____ glo - ry con - tin - ues, _____

mp Na - ture con - tin - ues, _____ glo - ry con - tin - ues, _____

mp Sun, _____ na - ture con - tin - ues, _____ Glo - ry con -
Sun, _____ na - ture con - tin - ues, _____ Glo - ry con -

mp Sun, _____ o sun, _____

Moderately slow, serene ♩ = 63

114 *p* *molto rit.*

S O set - - - - - ting

A O set - - - - - ting

T tin - ues, O set - - - - - ting

B tin - ues, O set - - - - - ting

o set - ing

molto rit.

16

Still slower ♩ = 60

molto rit.

118

Bar. Solo

P

O set - ting sun!

S

sun, o set - ting sun!

A

sun, o set - ting sun!

T

sun, o set - ting sun!

B

sun, o set - ting sun!

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

pp

ppp

Still slower ♩ = 60

molto rit.

December 31, 2011–January 3, 2012
San Francisco
5'42"

Also available

II. What Is the Grass? #8322

Tenor Solo, SATB Chorus

III. Facing West #8323

Soprano and Tenor Soli, SATB Chorus

Recorded by Cappella SF, Ragnar Bohlin, conductor; Delos CD 3524

David Conte (b. 1955)

For biographical information about the composer, please visit his website.

www.davidconte.net

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