

## 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 75<sup>th</sup> 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.

*Facing West* is drawn from the "Children of Adam" book from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The full title of the poem is *Facing West from California's Shores*. Though Whitman never visited California, his biographer, Justin Kaplan, made the insightful observation that "he imagined California's shores to be the starting point for a journey through time and culture. Here was Walt, 'a child, very old,' facing home again, looking over to it, joyous, as after long travel, growth, and sleep, asking: 'But where is what I started for, so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?'"

The invitation from the International Orange Chorale to compose a piece in honor of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge led me easily and naturally to this great poem. The tone of *Facing West* is rich and complex, and draws on one of Whitman's favorite themes of using travel to distant lands as a metaphor for spiritual development. In his poem, Whitman strikes notes of reflection, of longing for adventure, and ultimately ends with a question. The continuing relevance of this question is for me beautifully addressed by the contemporary American writer Edmund White in his 1980 book, *States of Desire*. To paraphrase somewhat, White writes: "California is where dreams may come true, and the problem it presents is whether, after all, we wanted these particular dreams to be fulfilled - or would we have preferred others? Did we know what price these dreams would exact? Did we anticipate the ways in which they would unsuit us for the business of daily life? Or should our notion of daily life itself be transformed?"

For Americans, California's coast is as far as one can go in establishing new roots and new ways of living. As a transplanted Midwesterner who has made California his home for nearly three decades, I experience the Golden Gate Bridge as a beautiful monument to the aspirations and dreams of a restless and inventive people, qualities that Whitman's poem captures perfectly.

—David Conte

### Facing West

Facing west, from California's shores,  
Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,

I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,  
Look off the shores of my Western Sea—the circle almost circled;

For, starting westward from Asia  
From the north—from the God, the sage, and the hero,  
From the south—from the flowery peninsulas, and the Spice Islands;

Long having wander'd since—round the earth having wander'd,  
Now I face home again—very pleas'd and joyous;

(But where is what I started for, so long ago?  
And why is it yet unfound?)

—Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Commissioned by the International Orange Chorale, Zane Fiala, Music Director,  
for the 75th Anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge

# A Whitman Triptych

Walt Whitman (1891–1892)  
*Facing West from California's Shores*  
D. C., alt.

David Conte

## III. Facing West

for Soprano and Tenor Soli, SATB Chorus unaccompanied

**Larghetto** ♩ = 52

*p*

Soprano  
Fac-ing west from Cal - i-for - nia's shores, In - quir - ing, - tire - less, -

Alto  
Fac-ing west from Cal - i-for-nia's shores, In - quir - ing, - tire - less, -

Tenor  
Fac-ing west from Cal - i-for-nia's shores, In - quir - ing, - tire - less, -

Bass  
Fac-ing west from Cal - i-for-nia's shores, In - quir - ing - - - tire - less,

**Larghetto** ♩ = 52

Piano  
(for rehearsal only)

6 *rit.* *mp* *p* *mp* *A tempo* ♩ = 52

seek - ing what is yet un - found, I, a child, ver - y old, o - ver

seek - ing what is yet un - found, I, a child, ver - y old, o - ver

seek - ing what is yet un - found, I, a child, ver - y old, o - ver

seek - ing what is yet un - found, I, a child, a child, ver - y old, o - ver

*rit.* *A tempo* ♩ = 52

11 *mf*

waves, towards the house of ma - ter - ni - ty, the land of mi - gra - tions, —

waves, towards the house of ma - ter - ni - ty, the land of mi - gra - tions, —

waves, towards the house of ma - ter - ni - ty, the land of mi - gra - tions, —

waves, towards the house of ma - ter - ni - ty, the land of mi - gra - tions, —

A bit faster ♩ = 56

16 *mp* *f* *mp*

Look a-far, Look off the shores of my West - ern sea, the

*mp* *f*

Look a-far, Look off the shores of my West - ern sea,

*mp* *f*

Look a - far, Look off the shores of my West - ern sea,

*mp* *f*

Look a - far, a-far, Look off the shores of my West - ern sea,

A bit faster ♩ = 56

A bit slower than  
Tempo I ♩ = 48 *rit.*

Faster, rhythmic ♩ = 92

20 *mp* *mp*

cir-cle al-most cir - cled; For, start-ing west-ward from A - sia,

*mp* *mp*

al - most cir - cled; For, start-ing west-ward from A - sia,

*mp* *mp*

a cir-cle al-most cir-cled; For, start-ing west-ward from A - sia, from A -

*mp* *mp*

al - most cir-cled; For, start-ing west-ward from A - sia, from A -

A bit slower than  
Tempo I ♩ = 48 *rit.*

Faster, rhythmic ♩ = 92

24 *mf*

from A - sia, \_\_\_\_\_ From the north, \_\_\_\_\_ from the God, the sage, and the he - ro,

*mf*

from A - sia, \_\_\_\_\_ From the north, \_\_\_\_\_ from the God, the sage, and the he - ro,

*mf*

- sia, \_\_\_\_\_ From the north, \_\_\_\_\_ from the God, the sage, and the he - ro, \_\_\_\_\_ the

*mf*

- sia, \_\_\_\_\_ From the north, \_\_\_\_\_ from the God, the sage, and the he - ro, \_\_\_\_\_ the

28 **A bit more leisurely, expressive** ♩ = 84 *p*

\_\_\_\_\_ From the south, \_\_\_\_\_ from the flow - 'ry pen - in - su-

*p*

\_\_\_\_\_ From the south, \_\_\_\_\_ from the flow - 'ry pen - in - su-

*p*

he - ro, \_\_\_\_\_ From the south, \_\_\_\_\_ from the flow - 'ry pen - in - su-las, \_\_\_\_\_

*p*

he - ro, \_\_\_\_\_ From the south, \_\_\_\_\_ from the flow - 'ry pen - in - su-las, \_\_\_\_\_

**A bit more leisurely, expressive** ♩ = 84

*molto rit.*Slower  $\text{♩} = 76$ *pp**mp solo*

33

las, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the spice \_\_\_\_\_ is - lands; Long hav-ing wan-der'd since \_\_\_\_\_

*pp*

las, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the spice \_\_\_\_\_ is - lands;

*pp**mp solo*

\_\_\_\_\_ and the spice \_\_\_\_\_ is - lands; \_\_\_\_\_ Long hav-ing wan-der'd

*pp*

\_\_\_\_\_ and the spice \_\_\_\_\_ is - lands; \_\_\_\_\_

*molto rit.*Slower  $\text{♩} = 76$ 

39

*rit.*Tempo I  $\text{♩} = 52$ *p tutti*

\_\_\_\_\_ round the earth hav-ing wan - der'd. Now I face home \_\_\_\_\_ a - gain

*p*

Now I face home \_\_\_\_\_ a - gain

*p tutti*

since, round the earth hav-ing wan-der'd, Now I face home \_\_\_\_\_ a - gain

*p*

Now I face home, I face home a - gain.

*rit.*Tempo I  $\text{♩} = 52$

Moving forward ♩ = 63

*allarg.*

Tempo I ♩ = 52

45 *cresc. poco a poco* *f* *ff*

ver - y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

*cresc. poco a poco* *f* *ff*

ver - y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

*cresc. poco a poco* *f* *ff*

ver - y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

*cresc. poco a poco* *f* *ff*

ver - y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

— ver-y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

Moving forward ♩ = 63

*allarg.*

Tempo I ♩ = 52

— ver-y pleas'd, ver - y pleas'd and joy

ous,

50 *mp solo* *p unis.*

ous;

ous;

ous; (But where is what I start-ed

joy - ous, joy - ous; hm

A tempo ♩ = 52

ous;

ous;

ous; (But where is what I start-ed

joy - ous, joy - ous; hm

55

*rit.* **Very slow** ♩ = 44 *molto rit.*

*p* *unis.* *div.* *pp*

(And why, and why is it yet un - found?)

*p* *pp*

(And why, and why is it yet un - found?)

*(solo)* *p* *tutti unis.* *pp*

for, so long a - go?) (And why, and why is it yet un - found?)

*p* *pp*

(And why, and why is it yet un - found?)

*rit.* **Very slow** ♩ = 44 *molto rit.*