

Program Notes

American Triptych presents aspects of spiritual experience as expressed by three North American poets: Americans E. E. Cummings and W. S. Merwin, and Canadian Bliss Carman. The chosen ensemble of instruments (harp, soprano saxophone, double bass, piano and percussion) gives the work a decidedly American character.

The first movement, *i thank You God*, is an extroverted fanfare of praise to God the Creator, with liberal use of mixed meter, syncopation and minimalist rhythmic patterns. The second movement, a modern translation of the tenth-century hymn *Veni Creator*, is more lyrical in character and gives each section of the chorus a solo verse accompanied by obligato solo lines in the instrumental ensemble. The third movement, *Mariner's Carol*, uses the metaphor of a sea journey to express

a spiritual journey toward wholeness. A return to the minimalist rhythmic textures of the first movement creates a mood both calm and expectant.

American Triptych was commissioned by the Reading Choral Society, Reading, Pennsylvania, David DeVenney, conductor. The work received its premiere performance on November 13, 1999.

The original orchestration for twenty-one instruments was reduced for the West Chester State University Chorus, David DeVenney, conductor. This work can also be performed with piano four-hands alone, or with piano four-hands and any combination of the ensemble instruments, with the two pianists omitting any doublings as indicated by the cues.

—David Conte

Veni Creator (Part One Only)

LORD of the grass and hill,
Lord of the rain,
White Overlord of will,
Master of pain,

I who am dust and air
Blown through the halls of death,
Like a pale ghost of prayer,—
I am thy breath.

Lord of the blade and leaf,
Lord of the bloom,
Sheer Overlord of grief,
Master of doom,

Lonely as wind or snow,
Through the vague world and dim,
Vagrant and glad I go;
I am thy whim.

[Lord of the storm and lull,
Lord of the sea,
I am thy broken gull,
Blown far alee.]

Lord of the harvest dew,
Lord of the dawn,
Star of the paling blue
Darkling and gone,

Lost on the mountain height
Where the first winds are stirred,
Out of the wells of night
I am thy word.

[Lord of the haunted hush,
Where raptures throng,
I am thy hermit thrush,
Ending no song.]

Lord of the frost and cold,
Lord of the North,
When the red sun grows old
And day goes forth,

I shall put off this girth,—
Go glad and free,
Earth to my mother earth,
Spirit to thee.

—Bliss Carman (1861–1929)

The text for *Veni Creator* is in the public domain. The composer abridged this poem in his setting. The bracketed paragraphs were omitted.

Instrumentation

Soprano Saxophone (I: tacet)
Percussion (3 players)
Xylophone
Marimba
Vibraphone
Glockenspiel
Suspended Cymbal
Hi-Hat Cymbals
Triangle
Bass Drum
Harp
Piano Four-hands
Contrabass

Durations

Movement I: 5:30
Movement II: 8:00
Movement III: 8:00
Total: 21:00

commissioned by the Reading Choral Society, Reading, Pennsylvania, David DeVenney, Conductor

American Triptych

for SATB Chorus and Piano Four-hands,
or Soprano Saxophone, Percussion (3 Players), Harp, Contrabass, and Piano Four-hands

II. Veni Creator

Bliss Carman (1861–1929)*
D. C., alt.

David Conte

Andante ♩ = 60

I

** (Sop. Sax.)

mp espr.

A

3

II

Piano Four-hands

Andante ♩ = 60
(Vibraphone, Marimba)

mp

p

6

I

mf

mp

3

3

3

II

mp

p

* The text for *Veni Creator* is in the Public Domain.

** Cue-sized notes should be played only in the version with accompaniment of piano-four hands alone.

13 *mf espr.*

A Lord

I *mf*

II *(Hp.) (Mar.) mp*

20 [B]

A of the grass and hill, Lord of the rain, Strong Ov-er-lord of will, Mas -

I *mp* *mf* *mp*

II *p (Hp.) mp*

25

A - ter of pain, We who are dust and air Blown through the halls of death,

I

II *p*

30 *mp* **C** *mf* *p*
 We are thy breath. —
 Like a pale ghost of pray'r, — We are thy breath. —
p *mf* *p*
p *mf* *p*
 We are thy breath. —

35 *mp* *mf*

39 **D** *mf espr.*
 Lord of the blade and leaf, Lord of the bloom, — Sheer
 (Sop. Sax.) *mp espr.*
p

44 E

S — Ov-er-lord of grief, Mas - ter of doom, Lone-ly as

I *mp*

II *mp* (Vib., Mar.) *p*

49

S wind and snow, Through the vague world and dim, Va - grant and glad we go; _

I (Sop. Sax.)

II

54 *mf* We are thy *f* whim. F

S
A
T
B

mp We are thy *f* whim.
mp We are thy *f* whim.

8^{va}

I

II

57 *loco* *rall.* G **A tempo**

p (Vib.)

rall. **A tempo**

p (Hp.)
*

* Depending on balance, the piano secundo may double the harp in mm. 59–82.

61 *mp*

B Lord ___ of the har - vest dew, _____ Lord ___ of _

I

II

66 *mf* **H**

T Star ___ of the pal - ing blue, _____ Dark -

B *poco* *mf* Star ___ of the pal - ing blue, _____ Dark -

I

II *

* Depending on balance, the piano secundo may double the harp in mm. 59–82.

79

B first winds are stirred, _____ Out _____ of the wells of night _____

mp

(8^{va})

I

II *p*

83

S *mf* We are thy word. *f* *div.*

A *mf* We are thy word. *f* *div.*

T *mf* We are thy word. *f*

B

loco

I *mp* *mf* *f*

II *mp* *mf* *f*

vd

86 (8^{va}) *loco*

I *meno f*

II *meno f*

90 *rall.* **K** *a tempo*

I (Hp.) *mp* *p* (Sop. Sax.) *p*

II *mp* *p*

96 *p* *ma intenso* *mp* *p* *p* *mp*

S A Lord of the frost and cold, Lord of the North,

T B *ma intenso* *mp* *p* *p* *mp*

Lord of the frost and cold, Lord of the North,

I

II

103 *mp* **L** *mf*

S A When the red sun grows old And the day goes

T B When the red sun grows old And the day goes

I *mp*

II

109 *f* *f*

S A forth, We shall put off this

T B forth, We shall put off this

I *f marcato*

II *f marcato*

113 M

S A *ff* girth,

T B *ff* girth,

I *ff* (8^{va})

II *ff*

116 *meno f* *loco* (8^{va})

119

Soprano (S): *p* **N** *mf* *mf*
Go glad and free,

Tenor (T): *p* *mf* *mf*
Go glad and free,

Piano (I): *mp* *mf* (Hp.) (Vib.)

Piano (II): *p* (Hp.)

124

Soprano (S): *p* *mp*
Earth to our moth - er earth,

Tenor (T): *p* *mp*
Earth to our moth - er earth,

Piano (I):

Piano (II):

127 **p** Spir - it to **mp** thee.

Spir - it to thee.

p Spir - it to **mp** thee.

Spir - it to thee.

I **mp** (Hp.)

II **mp** (Vib.)

131 **p** rit. poco a poco al fine

Spir - it to thee.

pp

T **p** rit. poco a poco al fine **pp**

I **p** **pp**

II **p** **p** (Hp.)