

## 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

### Mariner's Carol

So still the night swinging,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
Only the bows' seethe to lap us,  
Stays and wake whispering,  
The thin bell striking,  
And our hearts in their blindness.  
*O star, shine before us!*

The serpent's deep sliding,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
is everywhere around us,  
Heaves under us, gliding;  
We know its toothed curling  
The whale world encircles.  
*O star, shine before us!*

Crushed in its drag and keeping,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
The darkened dead have no peace,  
World-without-end shifting;  
All, all are there, and no resting.

It exults above their faces.  
*O star, shine before us!*

The horizon's perfect ring,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
None enters nor ever has.  
And we, like a cradle, rocking:  
For the first glimpse of our homing  
We roll and are restless.  
*O star, shine before us!*

Till, heaven and earth joining,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
It is born to us  
Like the first line of dawn breaking;  
For that word and sight yearning  
We keep the long watches.  
*O star, shine before us!*

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### 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 DeVemey, Conductor.

# American Triptych

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

## III. Mariner's Carol

W. S. Merwin (b. 1927)

David Conte

D. C., alt.

$\text{♩} = 60$

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

**Moderately, with great calm**  
 $\text{♩} = 60$

I  
(+ Celesta)

Piano  
Four-hands

**Moderately, with great calm**  
 $\text{♩} = 60$

II

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5

*p* *mp*

S  
A

So still the night swing - ing.

*p* *mp*

T  
B

So still the night swing - ing.

*p* *mp*

Wind

I

II

9

*pp* *p* *mp*

S  
A

On - ly the bows' see the to lap us,

*pp* *p* *mp*

T  
B

of our far - ing. On - ly the bows' see the to lap us,

*p* *mp*

I

II

13 *pp* *p* *mp* *pp* *p*

S A Stays and wake whis - per - ing, The

T B *pp* *p* *mp* *pp* *p*

Stays and wake whis - per - ing, The

I

II *p* *mp* *p*

17 [B] *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *mf*

S A thin bell strik - ing, And our hearts in their blind - ness.

T B *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *mf*

thin bell strik - ing, And our hearts in their blind - ness.

I *mf*

II *mp* *p* *mf*

22 *mp* *f* *p*

S A *mp* *f* *p*

T B *mp* *f* *p*

O star, shine be - fore us!

I *mf* *p* *mf* (Sop. Sax)

II *mf* *mf*

29 [C] *p*

S A *p*

T B *p*

The ser - pent's deep

I *p* (*tp.*)

II *p*

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

35 *mp* D *mp*

S  
slid - ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a -

A  
slid - ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a -

T  
slid - ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Wind \_\_\_\_\_ of our far-ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a -

B  
slid - ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Wind \_\_\_\_\_ of our far-ing, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a -

I

II

8

40 *mf* *mf*

S  
round us, \_\_\_\_\_ The ser-pent a - round us, \_\_\_\_\_

A  
round us, \_\_\_\_\_ The ser-pent a - round us, \_\_\_\_\_

T  
*mf* *mp* *mf*  
round us, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a - round us, \_\_\_\_\_

B  
*mf* *mp* *mf*  
round us, \_\_\_\_\_ Is ev - 'ry - where a - round us, \_\_\_\_\_

I  
*mf*

II  
*mf*

8<sup>va</sup>

8<sup>vb</sup>

E

45 *p* *mp* *mf*

S Heaves un - der us, glid - ing; —

A Heaves un - der us, glid - ing;

T Heaves un - der us, glid ing.

B Heaves un - der us, glid - ing; — Heaves un - der us glid - ing;

I *mp (Vib.)*

II *loco*

(8<sup>va</sup>)

(8<sup>vb</sup>)

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50

S *mf* We know its \_\_\_toothed curl - ing *f* The

A *mf* We know its \_\_\_toothed curl - ing *f* The

T *mf* We know \_\_\_ its \_\_\_toothed curl - ing *f* The whole world en -

B *mf* \_\_\_ We know \_\_\_ its \_\_\_toothed curl - ing *f* The whole world en -

I *f*

II *cresc.* *f*

55

**S**  
whole world en - cir - cles. \_\_\_\_\_ O star, O star, shine - be -

**A**  
whole world en - cir - cles. \_\_\_\_\_ O star, O star, shine - be -

**T**  
cir - cles. \_\_\_\_\_ O star, O star, shine - be -

**B**  
cir - cles. \_\_\_\_\_ O star, O star, shine be -

**I**

**II**

*ff* **F**

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff* > *pp* < *mf*

60

G

S  
fore us!

A  
fore us!

T  
fore us!

B  
fore us, be - fore us!

*p*

*f*

*p*

*p*

I  
(Sop. Sax.)  
*f*

II  
*pp*

*mf*

*mf*

*mp*

64

H

I  
(Sop. Sax.)  
*mf*

II  
*mf*

69

B

*mp*

Crushed in its drag —

I

II

73

T

*mp*

The dark-ened dead —

B

and keep - ing, — *Wind of our far-ing,* — *mp* The dark-ened dead — *mp*

I

(Sop. Sax.) *mp*

II

77

T *mf* *cresc.*  
— have no peace, ——— World with-out end — shift —

B *mf* *cresc.*  
— have no peace, ——— World with-out end — shift —

I *mf*

II

81

T *f*  
— ing; ——— All, ——— all are there, and no rest - ing. —

B *f*  
— ing; ——— All, ——— all are there, and no rest - ing. —

I *f*

II *f*

85 *mf* *f*

T It ex-ul-ts a-bove\_ their fac - es. *f*

B It ex-ul-ts a-bove\_ their fac - es. *f*

I *mf* *cresc.* (Sop. Sax.) *f*

II *mf* *cresc.*

90 **J** *ff* *p*

T star, — O star shine be - fore us! *p*

B star, — O star shine be - fore us, — be - fore us! *ff*

I *f* (Mar.) *mf* *mp*

II *f* (Hp.) *f*

95 *p* *poco rit.* **K** *A tempo*

*poco rit.* *A tempo* *8va*

*p*

*p* (Hp.)

101 *mp*

The hor-i - zon's per-fect ring, \_\_\_\_\_

*mp*

Wind \_\_\_\_\_ of our far - ing, —

(8va)

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for page 16, measures 95 to 101. It is in 3/4 time and G major. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes parts for Bassoon (B), Piano I (I), Piano II (II), Soprano (S), and Alto (A). At measure 95, the piano parts begin with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bassoon part has a *poco rit.* marking. At measure 101, the vocal parts enter with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The piano parts continue with *p* dynamics. There are several hand-crossing markings between the piano parts. A section starting at measure 101 is marked *8va* (octave up). A box labeled 'K' is placed above the bassoon part at measure 95. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: 'The hor-i - zon's per-fect ring, \_\_\_\_\_' for Soprano and 'Wind \_\_\_\_\_ of our far - ing, —' for Alto.

\* From letter K to letter M there are frequent hand crossings between the two pianists. Players may redistribute parts as desired.

106

S *mp* None en - ters nor ev - er *mf* has.

A *mp* None en - ters nor ev - er *mf* has.

(8<sup>va</sup>)

I

II

111 **L**

S *mp* And we, like a crad - le, rock - ing: \_\_\_\_\_

A *mp* And we, like a crad - le, rock - ing: \_\_\_\_\_

(8<sup>va</sup>)

I *mp*

II *mp*



116

S For the first glimpse of our hom - ing We roll and are

A For the first glimpse of our hom - ing We roll and are

I *mp*

II

121

S rest - - less. O star, shine be - fore us!

A rest - - less. O star, O star, shine be - fore us!

I *f*

II *cresc.* *f* *mp*

M N

127 *p*

S

A

*p*

(Sop. Sax.) loco

*mp*

I

II

133

I

II

*mf*

*mf*

137

S  
A

Till, heav'n and earth

T  
B

Till, heav'n and earth

*not forced* **f** 2

I

II

**f** *mf*

141

S  
A

join - ing, It is born to

T  
B

join - ing, Wind of our far - ing, It is born to

2 2

I

II

145 **P**

S  
A  
us \_\_\_\_\_ Like the first line \_\_\_\_\_ of dawn break - ing; \_\_\_\_\_

T  
B  
us \_\_\_\_\_ Like the first line \_\_\_\_\_ of dawn break - ing; \_\_\_\_\_

I

II

149

S  
A  
\_\_\_\_\_ For that word \_\_\_\_\_ and sight \_\_\_\_\_ yearn - ing \_\_\_\_\_ We

T  
B  
\_\_\_\_\_ For that word \_\_\_\_\_ and sight \_\_\_\_\_ yearn - ing \_\_\_\_\_ We

I

II

153

S A watch - - - es. *ff*

T B watch - - - es. *ff*

I *cresc.* *ff*

II *cresc.* *ff*

keep the long watch - - - es. O star,

158

S A *mf* *mp* *mf* *p*

T B *mp* *mf* *p*

I *mp (Vib.)* *p*

II (Mar.) *p*

O star,

**R** 164 Chorus I *pp* *mp*  
S A to end  
T B  
O star, shine be - fore us! O

Chorus II *pp* *mp*  
S A to end  
T B  
O star, shine be -

I  
II

169 *mp*

S  
A  
star, shine be - fore us,

T  
B  
star, shine be - fore us,

S  
A  
fore us! O star,

T  
B  
fore us! O star,

I  
Celesta\* *pp* 10 *pp* 10

II  
(Hp.) *pp*

\* If no Celesta is available, play on the piano an octave higher.

172 *p* *pp* S

S A *pp* *pp*  
be - fore us!

T B *p* *pp*  
be - fore us!

S A *mp* *pp*  
shine be - fore us, be - fore us!

T B *mp* *pp*  
shine be - fore us, be - fore us!

I

II

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Musical score for SATB choir and piano. The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) parts, all marked *ppp*. The second system also includes Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) parts, all marked *ppp*. The third system includes the piano accompaniment, with the right hand (I) and left hand (II). The piano part includes markings for Glockenspiel (Glock.) and Vibraphone (Vib.), and a dynamic marking of *p*. The score is marked with measure numbers 176, 177, 178, and 179. A large diagonal watermark reading "COPYING IS ILLEGAL" is overlaid on the score.