

“ALL THE EARTH SHALL SING”: A CONDUCTOR’S GUIDE TO THE CHORAL
SETTINGS OF WENDELL BERRY’S POETRY

by

MATTHEW TIMONTHY TAYLOR

(Under the Direction of Daniel Bara)

ABSTRACT

Poet, novelist, essayist, and agrarian Wendell Berry is a celebrated figure of American literature. A lifelong farmer and advocate for small local communities, Berry has written over fifty books of poetry, essays, and fiction. Central to his writings are the themes of husbandry, stewardship, fidelity, loyalty to place and community, and the virtues of living in harmony with the natural world. Berry’s poetry has been set to vocal music in solo, chamber, and choral settings. Over 90 published choral works use Berry’s poetry as a text source. The purpose of this document is to provide choral conductors with a biographical context for Wendell Berry and an overview of his written work, and to present an annotated bibliography of all of the published choral settings that use Berry’s poetry. Each choral work will be examined individually, providing basic compositional details of each score and offering performance considerations for choral conductors. This guide will serve as a resource to choral musicians, allowing directors to quickly gather information and identify works appropriate for their ensemble, while revealing the full extent of the excellent Wendell Berry choral settings available to today’s choirs.

INDEX WORDS: Choral music, Wendell Berry, Poetry, American authors, Annotated bibliography

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who patiently and lovingly fielded many panicked calls home during my freshman year, and encouraged 19-year-old me to give a career in music a real shot. Their unwavering love and support is the thread that has weaved through every milestone and every valley of my life, musical or not. I am forever grateful to them.

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Special thanks to the numerous composers who provided me with scores and who warmly answered my various questions in this research process. Thank you to Andrew Maxfield, whose wonderful *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music* settings were an early inspiration to this project, and who kindly offered to help however he could. I'm very grateful to my friend Richard Blumenthal, who helped create reference recordings for select pieces to assist my own score study. Thanks also to Counterpoint Press for granting reprint permissions for this study, allowing Berry's excellent poetry to be printed within this document in its full form. And a big thank you to my committee for their encouragement and guidance throughout this whole process.

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Copeland, John Dickson, Trey Davis, Eric Wilkinson, Lizzie Keene, Dan Bara, JD Burnett, Liz Knight, and Rebecca Atkins. I hope to show my students the same spirit of kindness and investment that has been shown to me by so many of you.

Thank you to my dad and my sister Kel for loving Wendell Berry's writing before I did, and for loving poetry in a way that I always aspire to. A genuine thank you to Nick Offerman (yes) for the eloquent way in which he expresses his love for Berry's writing - his words were early inspiration for this project. Within the many hours of score study, it has been a genuine joy to spend so much time immersed in the poetry of Wendell Berry. I first encountered his writing in the choir room, singing some of the pieces within this study. Those early experiences sparked a deep love for his writing, ultimately leading to this project. I hope this study adequately expresses my admiration for Mr. Berry, and my gratitude for his lifetime of writing. May we sing his words with the same imagination, principle, and care with which he writes them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, AND METHODOLOGY.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Methodology.....	5
Delimitations.....	6
Organization.....	7
2. BIOGRAPHY AND WRITTEN WORK	
Biography.....	8
Written Work.....	18
Recurring themes and motifs in Berry's poetry.....	22
3. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	28
4. CONCLUSIONS.....	170
APPENDICES.....	176
A. WORKS LISTED IN ORDER OF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	176
B. WORKS LISTED BY COMPOSER.....	181
C. WORKS LISTED BY VOICING & DIFFICULTY.....	185
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	189

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Poet, essayist, novelist, farmer, and agrarian Wendell Berry is a celebrated figure of contemporary American literature, lauded by the Library of America as “our essential modern exemplar of an American way of thinking and writing about nature, and place.”¹ Berry’s accolades are numerous, and include the prestigious Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award and the National Humanities Medal, awarded by President Barack Obama in 2011.² His written work consists of over 50 published books, and includes works of fiction, essays, and poetry. Central to Berry’s writings are the themes of husbandry, stewardship, fidelity, loyalty to place and community, and the virtues of living in harmony with the natural world.

Wendell Berry’s writing has been set to vocal music in solo, chamber, and choral settings, and today’s choral conductors have likely encountered popular choral settings of Berry’s best-known poems. Many may be familiar with his poem “The Peace of Wild Things,” which has been set by thirteen composers. However, the breadth of choral music that uses Berry’s writing spans far beyond this single poem. Over 90 published choral works have used Berry’s writing as a text source. Of them, 77 have been written in the past two decades, and 90 are settings by American composers. As such, there is reason to see Berry’s voice as both distinctly influential

¹ Hope Reese, “Wendell Berry Is Still ahead of Us,” Vox (Vox, October 2, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/2/20862854/wendell-berry-climate-change-port-royal-michael-pollan>.

² “Wendell Berry,” Poetry Foundation, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/wendell-berry>

to American choral music, and as a literary voice that will continue to inspire new choral compositions for years to come.

The purpose of this document is to provide choral conductors with a biographical context for Wendell Berry and an overview of his written work, and to present an annotated bibliography of all of the published choral settings that use his poetry. Each choral work will be examined individually, providing basic compositional details of each score and offering performance considerations for choral conductors. This guide will serve as a resource to choral musicians, allowing directors to quickly gather information and identify works appropriate for their ensemble, while revealing the full extent of the excellent Wendell Berry choral settings available to today's choirs.

Review of Literature

To best understand Berry's poetry as it relates to the choral settings discussed in this document, a knowledge of Berry's stylistic and philosophical tendencies as a whole is crucial. While it is beyond the scope and purpose of this dissertation to analyze the comprehensive body of Berry's work, a contextualization of his writings will be realized through the writings of fellow poets and critical literary scholars, as well as Berry's own words regarding his writing.

Books and Articles Concerning Berry's Life and Work

The details of Berry's life and upbringing are outlined in many books and journal articles. A source of particular substance to this study is Andrew J Angyal's *Wendell Berry*, which offers the greatest amount of detail about Berry's upbringing, education, and early career.³ Another notable source is Fritz Oehlschlaeger's 2011 book *The Achievement of Wendell Berry: The Hard History of Love*, which provides a comprehensive overview of Berry's body of work and his

³ Andrew J Angyal, *Wendell Berry* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

agrarian and cultural philosophies.⁴ Both Angyal and Oehlschlaeger also devote chapters specifically to Berry's poetic writing style. The National Endowment for the Humanities offers a notable biography of Berry which includes an interview transcript between Jim Leach and Wendell Berry and his wife Tanya, in which Berry recalls specifics from his career.⁵

Reception of Berry's Writing and Poetry

In addition to the works above, several books about Wendell Berry have been compiled as collections of essays from authors, poets, and religious writers regarding Berry's writing. *Wendell Berry*, compiled and edited by Paul Merchant, is a particularly useful source and contains essays about his poetry and writing style.⁶ This study also consults the work of several book review articles written in appreciation and criticism of Berry's poetry.

Wendell's Own Voice: Interviews and Written Work

Ever thoughtful and careful with his choice of words, Wendell Berry has often avoided interviews, sometimes opting for written correspondence rather than in-person discussion. The interviews that do exist are thoughtful and insightful as the author reflects on his life and work. Morris Allen Grubbs's 2007 compilation of interview transcriptions, entitled *Conversations with Wendell Berry*, offers a wealth of context and insight into Berry's writing style given from the author himself.⁷ Paul Merchant's book mentioned above also contains interview transcripts with Berry.

⁴ Fritz Oehlschlaeger, *The Achievement of Wendell Berry: The Hard History of Love* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

⁵ "Wendell E. Berry," National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 2012, <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-biography>.

⁶ Paul Merchant, ed., *Wendell Berry*, (Lewiston, ID: Confluence Press, Inc., 1991).

⁷ Morris Allen Grubbs, ed., *Conversations with Wendell Berry* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007).

It is perhaps obvious that as a gifted and prolific writer, Wendell Berry also candidly shares his beliefs across his many books of essays. Two collections of essays are of particular significance to this study. *The Long Legged House* was Berry's first collection of essays and presents personal details of Berry's early years and return to Kentucky.⁸ *Standing By Words* offers Berry's thoughts on poetry. His essay "unspecializing poetry" is particularly noteworthy and is referenced multiple times throughout this study.⁹ Lastly, selections of Berry's poetry will be presented in their original form within the Annotated Bibliography (Chapter 3). As such, the original writings of Berry will be consulted and used as sources as well.

Musical Scholarship and Scores

Though Berry's writing has been a source of inspiration for composers in the last few decades, there is virtually no existing scholarship that focuses on the relationship between his writing and music. Notably, composer Andrew Maxfield developed his collection of Wendell Berry choral settings into a collaboration with the Salt Lake Vocal Artists, culminating in a published recording album entitled *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*. Maxfield shares insightful context about the project and his relationship with Wendell in the liner notes of the album.¹⁰ Similarly, composer Malcolm Dalglish created a song cycle for chorus and soloists entitled *Hymnody of Earth*, which in its liner notes contains remarks from Wendell concerning the project and the relationship between his poetry and music.

The remaining literature relevant to this dissertation comes from the collection of scores themselves. Several composers offer valuable information regarding their settings or

⁸ Wendell Berry, *The Long-Legged House* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003).

⁹ Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words : Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Andrew Maxfield, liner notes for *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*. Performed by The Salt Lake Vocal Artists, conducted by Brady R. Allred, Tantara Records, 2017, CD.

interpretation of Berry's poetry within the introductions of the score or on their publisher websites. In these cases, the writings of individual composers will be used as references and sources as well.

Methodology

The choral works in this study were collected through comprehensive internet searches, online music publisher websites, and email correspondences with composers. The collection presented in this study represents the complete volume of available published Wendell Berry choral settings as of December 2023.

This document's second chapter will focus on the life, work, and core beliefs of Wendell Berry as a writer and farmer. A brief biography will detail Berry's youth, education, and writing career. Attention will be given to Berry's cultural, philosophical, and religious beliefs, all of which have influenced his writing. Berry's output as a writer is extensive—his works of fiction and books of essays will be addressed briefly; however, the choral settings of Wendell Berry almost exclusively draw from his poetry, so particular attention will be given to his poetic works. The chapter will conclude with a list and description of some of the most commonly occurring themes and motifs present within Berry's poetry. Context will be given each theme or motif, supplemented by quotations of literary scholars and Berry regarding his own writing.

Chapter 3 will present the surveyed choral music in this study, consisting of 91 published choral works which use a total of 47 Wendell Berry texts. Each choral work's analysis will be preceded by the full Wendell Berry text presented in its original form, along with contextual information surrounding the text's first publication. Each choral analysis will offer the following information regarding the work: title, composer, poem, text usage, voicing, forces, vocal ranges, meter, key signature, difficulty level, duration, character words, publisher (and published

number), date published, and notes. Each “notes” entry will consist of one to three paragraphs of noteworthy characteristics within the composition. The primary focus of this category is to offer conductor-informed insights to choral directors and assist them in determining what is appropriate for their ensembles.

The bibliography will be ordered according to the number of choral settings that exist for each text, beginning with the most commonly-set text and working down to texts which are set only once. From there, the poems are grouped together by book.

Delimitations

This document will focus solely on the published choral works that use Berry’s writing, and the specific texts therein. It will not address other musical forms which incorporate his writing. A small number of Berry choral settings remain unpublished and are unavailable for purchase. These works will not be listed within this document.

This document is designed for the programming choral conductor, and caters itself to those interested in selecting individual or multiple settings to build or supplement their concert programs. The 91 works examined within the bibliography are mostly octavos, moderately short in duration and limited in their use of instruments. In the instances where a composer provides a reduced instrumentation from a larger orchestral scoring, the reduced score will be surveyed. Aside from this, there are a few particular settings whose large orchestration, exceptional difficulty, or fragmented use of Berry’s writing warrant their separation from the works listed in the annotated bibliography. These works will be mentioned in Chapter 4, but excluded from the bibliography.

Organization

Chapter 1: *Introduction, Review of Literature, and Methodology*

Chapter 2: *Biography and Reception*. A brief biography of Wendell Berry, offering insights into his background, career, and philosophical beliefs. Attention will be given to Berry's place among American writers as seen by his supporters and critics.

Chapter 3: *Annotated Bibliography*. A collection of 91 scores and 47 texts, examined in the order and detail outlined above.

Chapter 4: *Conclusions*. Observations and conclusions drawn from the annotated bibliography, and recommendations for further study for conductors.

Appendix A: Choral Works Listed in Order of Annotated Bibliography

Appendix B: Choral Works Listed by Composer

Appendix C: Choral Works Listed by Voicing and Difficulty

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY AND WRITTEN WORK

I. Biography

Early Years and Education

Wendell Erdman Berry was born in 1934 in New Castle, Kentucky. His parents, Virginia Erdman and John Marshall Berry, were both from farming families with deep roots in Henry County dating back five generations.¹¹ Wendell's father John Marshall Berry was a tobacco farmer and a lawyer. John Marshall left Kentucky in his youth to work on the congressional campaign staff of Virgil Chapman and attend law school at George Washington University, but chose to return to Henry County where he continued to farm and helped draft legislation under the New Deal, particularly advocating for tobacco farmers. He was one of the founders of the Kentucky Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association, eventually serving as its president.¹²

Wendell's early childhood years were shaped by his experiences growing up within a self-supporting farming community. In the time of his youth, Henry County consisted of several small independently-owned farms. Burley tobacco was the main cash crop of the region, but farmers produced diversified foods to supply their own needs, and excess goods could be sold locally within the community. Berry witnessed the last generation of farmers to use draft animals rather than machinery, and learned how to farm with horses and mules in his youth. Wendell

¹¹ "Wendell Berry," The Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://carnegiecenterlex.org/kwhf-2015-wendell-berry/>

¹² "Wendell E. Berry," National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 2012, <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-biography>

worked the farm with his brother John and often accompanied his father on Sunday afternoon trips to converse with local neighbors, exchanging farming methods and sharing knowledge of the land. From his Grandmother he learned how to milk cows and care for chickens, as well as can and preserve various fruits and vegetables. These lessons instilled within Berry a deep appreciation for local knowledge and the value of its passage from generation to generation.¹³

Berry's youth was also shaped by an affinity for retreats into nature. His maternal great uncle Curran Matthews built a small fishing cabin next to the Kentucky River, which became a common summer retreat for family gatherings and get-togethers. From an early age, Berry associated the cabin with imaginative and creative freedom. Known to Berry and his siblings as "Camp Curran" or simply, "the Camp," it remained a place of retreat through his youth and into his early writing career.¹⁴ Eventually, Berry inherited the land on which the cabin was built and turned the cabin into his writer's study.

Wendell's father enrolled him in the Millersburg Military Institute for high school, a private all-male college preparatory school which consisted of about 100 students. The school was a military academy that enacted strict discipline and expected all students to participate in team sports. Even in his youth, Wendell exhibited an aversion to social conformity, which sparked some rebellion in his behavior as a student. Being required to attend Millersburg made Wendell and his brother John "keenly aware of their lost freedom."¹⁵ However, his years at the school did present him with the chance to begin developing his voice as a writer. While at Millersburg, he began to write for the monthly campus newspaper and served as editor during his senior year.

¹³ Andrew J Angyal, *Wendell Berry* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 5

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8

By the fall of 1952, Berry entered the University of Kentucky, pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in English in the hopes of becoming a writer. In addition to his writing courses, Berry showed a particular interest in Kentucky history, eventually assisting one of his professors on trips across the state to collect manuscripts for the University of Kentucky library. His earliest pieces of writing showcased a preoccupation with his native region, a subject that has remained at the core of his work throughout his writing career. In his time as an undergraduate, Berry published poems and short stories through the university's literary magazine *Stylus*, winning the magazine's Dantzler Award twice with submissions of short stories.¹⁶ His accolades quickly grew, and upon completing his degree in 1956, Berry chose to stay for a master's degree, which he completed the following year. While studying at The University of Kentucky he also met his future wife Tanya Amyx, whom he married in 1957.

Post-Graduate Studies, Return to Kentucky, and Teaching Career

After graduating with his master's degree, Berry taught for one year as an English instructor at Georgetown College in Kentucky, his father's alma mater. He was at work on his first novel and wished to pursue further study in creative writing. He applied to the creative writing program at Stanford University, and in 1958 was awarded a Wallace Stegner Fellowship. While at Stanford, Berry studied alongside other notable American writers in the program including Ernest J. Gaines and Ken Kesey. He continued to craft and finish his first novel, *Nathan Coulter*, and in his second year at Stanford he was appointed as the Edward H. Jones Lecturer in Creative Writing. Berry has credited Wallace Stegner as a continual influence throughout the course of his writing career.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid, 10

¹⁷ "Wendell E. Berry," NEH

Following his time at Stanford, Wendell and Tanya returned to Kentucky for a year, moving onto property in Henry County owned by Berry's father. Berry worked on the farm and continued to write. He was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961, which afforded him the opportunity to travel abroad, so Berry spent the year traveling with his family in France and Italy. Upon returning to America, Berry was appointed to a faculty position at New York University. He served as an associate professor of English and director of freshman English at the school's University Heights campus in the Bronx from 1962 to 1964.¹⁸

In 1964, Berry received an offer to teach at the University of Kentucky, a career opportunity that ultimately prompted a permanent return to his native Kentucky. Wendell and Tanya returned to Kentucky in 1964, purchasing a farm in Port Royal adjacent to land that had been owned by Berry's grandfather. The property Berry purchased is known as Lane's Landing.¹⁹ Both he and Tanya live on this 125-acre farm to this day.

Berry taught in the English Department at the University of Kentucky from 1964 until 1977. He was named Distinguished Professor of the Year by the College of Arts and Sciences in 1971 and was granted a sabbatical semester to write. Berry ultimately resigned from his faculty position in 1977 to devote himself fully to writing and farming. He was asked again to join the English Department at Kentucky in 1987, which he did until 1993 when he resigned again. Over the span of his career he has also held various writer-in-residence positions at academic institutions including Bucknell University, Centre College, and Trinity College.²⁰ Despite his numerous appointments within academia, Berry regards higher education with some skepticism.

¹⁸ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 33

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 139

He has criticized the decline of the liberal arts curriculum, and is quick to argue that college is not the best choice for all young people.²¹

Wendell and Tanya have raised two children, Mary and Den, who both live and farm nearby in Kentucky. Their daughter Mary currently serves as the Executive Director of The Berry Center, a Kentucky-based nonprofit organization established in 2011, devoted to “putting Wendell Berry’s writings to work by advocating for small farmers, land-conserving communities, and healthy regional economies.”²² From his home in Port Royal, Berry has continued to farm and write essays, poetry, and works of fiction.

Wendell Berry has been the recipient of many awards recognizing his lifetime of work. He was awarded the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016 by the National Books Critics Circles. President Barack Obama awarded Berry the National Humanities Medal in 2011. Berry also delivered the 41st Jefferson Lecture, hosted by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has received several other awards including the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Aiken Taylor Award for poetry, and the John Hay Award of the Orion Society.²³ He is the first living writer to be inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame, and in 2019 he became the second living writer to have his work published in a box set by the Library of America, an organization “widely recognized as the definitive collection of American writing.”²⁴

Philosophical and Cultural Beliefs

Wendell Berry has been described as the sum of his beliefs. His writing reflects his living, which has been shaped by a lifetime of devotion to the American family farm. His agrarian

²¹ “Wendell E Berry,” NEH

²² “About Us,” The Berry Center, n.d., <https://berrycenter.org/about/>

²³ Poetry Foundation, “Wendell Berry,” Poetry Foundation, 2016, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/wendell-berry>.

²⁴ “Overview,” Library of America, accessed February 6, 2024, <https://www.loa.org/about/>.

principles are the foundation from which his philosophical, cultural, and political beliefs are formed. Key among these principles are: the value of local culture and local economies, commitment to one's community and place, care for the natural world, and the virtue of good work. Jebediah Britton-Purdy summarizes Berry's largely unchanging values across his lifetime of writing and activism:

Over the years, he has called himself an agrarian, a pacifist, and a Christian—albeit of an eccentric kind. He has written against all forms of violence and destruction—of land, communities, and human beings—and argued that the modern American way of life is a skein of violence. He is an anti-capitalist moralist and a writer of praise for what he admires: the quiet, mostly uncelebrated labor and affection that keep the world whole and might still redeem it.²⁵

These beliefs manifest for Wendell Berry in both word and deed. His writings display a remarkable consistency across genres in their use of similar themes. In addition to his work as a writer and farmer, Berry has practiced his beliefs as an activist, participating in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience and rallies in opposition to industrial exploitations of the earth's natural resources, such as coal-burning power plants and mountaintop removal coal mining.

Berry says that his standards are not political; rather, they are first and foremost *ecological*, from which he addresses matters that are social and cultural.²⁶ In an essay entitled “Discipline and Hope,” he concludes that “there is only one value: the life and health of the world.”²⁷ This ecological perspective is the bedrock upon which he forms all of his other beliefs. To use one example: Berry is a pacifist, but his definition of pacifism extends to all forms of life, and the earth itself. He argues that environmental destruction is itself an act of violence, “not only against the earth but also against those who are dependent on it, including ourselves.”²⁸

²⁵ Jedediah Britton-Purdy, “Wendell Berry’s Lifelong Dissent,” www.thenation.com, September 9, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/wendell-berry-essays-library-of-america-review/>

²⁶ “Wendell E Berry,” NEH

²⁷ Wendell Berry, *A Continuous Harmony : Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint Press, 2012)

²⁸ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 37

Berry has spent his lifetime advocating for the value of small local economies. His thinking reflects that of Thomas Jefferson, whose vision for America promoted the idea of an agrarian republic in which landowners could live in self-reliant local economies of their own making. This idea of a cooperative economy, built on sustainable farming practices and informed by local knowledge, is one which Berry ascribes to as a farmer himself and often depicts in his writing. He commonly uses the word *stewardship* when he writes, referring to an intimate and rooted knowledge of the land one tends, and an investment in its future. The Berry Center, built with the mission of “putting Wendell Berry’s writings to work,” advocates for small farmers, land-conserving communities, and healthy regional economies. The organization currently offers young farmers a tuition free undergraduate degree in regenerative agriculture through Sterling College.²⁹

Berry views culture and agriculture as inextricably linked concepts. Healthy local economies are tied to healthy local communities which practice care and generosity towards the land and its inhabitants. A globalized industrial economy is one whose single motive is the highest margin of profit. Berry warns that “economic efficiency” is often a veiled name for corporate profit and large-scale greed, and that the most characteristic progress of the industrial economy has been the consolidation of wealth and power into fewer and fewer hands. The industrialization of agriculture, made possible through the use of synthetic chemicals, industrial barns, and mechanical harvesters, irrevocably damages local land and local communities. To Berry, this industrial economy thrives by damage, threatens the culture and wellbeing of local communities, and exploits the earth.³⁰

²⁹ “About Us,” The Berry Center

³⁰ Christine Casson, “The ‘Mad’ Farmer,” *American Scientist* 96, no. 6 (2008): 516, <https://doi.org/10.1511/2008.75.516>.

Berry has spent his career advocating for a way of life that has largely been lost to the forces of modernization. He has defended local economies and sustainable farming practices while witnessing his community bend to the influences of urbanization and an increasing global economy. Berry's hometown, which housed 16 businesses when his mother was young, now contains a single general store.³¹ The number of independent farmers in Henry County has diminished greatly, and those who still farm there must support themselves through non-farming jobs. Industrial agriculture, for its part, has devastated the health of American farmland in gratuitous sizes. This destruction of land, Berry argues, creates a one-way economy which drains the remaining farmland as urban cities flourish. "They're prospering because they're plundering their own country," he writes.³²

For his part, however, Berry's beliefs and principles have remained remarkably unchanged, and he continues to abide by them. He has continued to use draft animals for work on his farm, rejecting the use of tractors and other industrial machinery. He has never owned a computer (a lifelong skeptic of technology) and still communicates through handwritten correspondence. His stubbornness has been met with both scorn and praise, but leads us to an important reminder when we read his words: Berry lives as he writes. He is not preoccupied with nostalgia for a way of life gone by. Rather, his vision remains in the present: "He does not want to celebrate an earlier age...Berry wants to come to terms with it in the service of a clear-eyed present and a changed future."³³ To that end, Berry's advocacy for sustainable agriculture remains steadfast. The Berry Center says that the works of Wendell and his family members all

³¹ Hope Reese, "Wendell Berry Is Still ahead of Us," Vox (Vox, October 2, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/2/20862854/wendell-berry-climate-change-port-royal-michael-pollan>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Britton-Purdy, "Wendell Berry's Lifelong Dissent"

reflect a single vision: “A state and a nation of prosperous well-tended farms serving and supporting healthy local communities.”³⁴

Berry has lived his life as he best sees fit: by agrarian principles and lessons garnered through devotion to his place. He is not a politician or policy maker, and he twice walked away from a career in teaching. He is ultimately a farmer and writer, and he lives and writes according to the principles he holds. Andrew J. Angyal offers that Berry’s defense of traditional farming practices is not intended as an economic treatise or sociological blueprint, but simply as “a vision of the good life”³⁵

Religious Beliefs

Berry has called Christianity “for better or worse” his native religion, though he has avoided conforming his thoughts within any particular denomination. Much of his religious writing is focused on human interaction with the natural world, which he sees as inextricably linked to the Creator (“Creation is God’s presence in creatures,” he writes).³⁶ He claims that the Bible is best read and understood outdoors. On Sundays of nice weather, he opts to wander in the woods rather than attend his local church. He holds respect for other religions whose creeds foster care for the natural world and its inhabitants, and says he has a “considerable debt” to Buddhism.

Though he calls himself a Christian, Berry has been outspokenly critical of institutional Christianity. He cites “virtually catastrophic discrepancies” between what he reads as biblical instruction and Christian behavior. Modern Christianity, he argues, has cut itself off from both nature and culture by becoming complicit to an exploitative economy which destroys the earth.

³⁴ “About Us,” The Berry Center

³⁵ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 33

³⁶ Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” *CrossCurrents* 43, no. 2 (1993), 150

Christian organizations, he argues, are as “happily indifferent as most industrial organizations to the ecological, cultural, and religious implications of industrial economics.”³⁷ Berry calls this indifference a “most horrid blasphemy,” and considers Christian institutions to be complicit in their disregard for the exploitation of other cultures and indifference to industrial economics: “The certified Christian seems just as likely as anyone else to join the military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation.”³⁸

Berry’s Hope for Humanity

In an effort to explore the totality of Berry’s vision, let us consider a list of ten commands that Berry offered in a commencement address, delivered in June 1989 at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine. Berry concluded his speech to the graduates with these commands, which he offered “is simply my hope for us all.” Together they reflect the core of his beliefs, lived out in his farming, citizenry, and writing.

1. Beware the justice of Nature.
2. Understand that there can be no successful human economy apart from Nature or in defiance of Nature.
3. Understand that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale.
4. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else. Learn, therefore, to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity, and glamour.
5. Make a home. Help to make a community. Be loyal to what you have made.
6. Put the interest of the community first.
7. Love your neighbors—not the neighbors you pick out, but the ones you have.
8. Love this miraculous world that we did not make, that is a gift to us.

³⁷ Ibid, 152

³⁸ Ibid, 150

9. As far as you are able make your lives dependent upon your local place, neighborhood, and household—which thrive by care and generosity—and independent of the industrial economy, which thrives by damage.
10. Find work, if you can, that does no damage. Enjoy your work. Work well.³⁹

II. Written Work

Wendell Berry has authored over 50 books of poetry, fiction, and essays. He is a prolific writer in each genre and has a remarkable gift for communicating his ideas with clarity, conviction, humor, and astute observation. This paper primarily concerns Berry's poetry, but readers are encouraged to engage with his excellent works of fiction and essays as well. In doing so, one will quickly find that all of Berry's writing draws upon the totality of his vision, as Morris Allen Grubbs shares:

“His poems testify to the mysteries and miracles of life lived in the effort of harmony with land and neighbors; his fiction explores the difficulties and rewards of—and offers a model for—living a community-minded, peaceable, compassionate life; his essays provide the reasoning and evidence for why we should care about the mysteries and miracles, the community and compassion”

Works of Fiction and Essays

Berry's fiction writing includes eight novels and fifty seven short stories. The majority of his stories are set within the fictional town of Port William, a creation of Berry's inspired by his hometown of Port Royal, Kentucky. Berry completed his first novel *Nathan Coulter* while participating in the Wallace Stegner fellowship at Stanford. It is the first novel which introduces his readers to the town of Port William and its residents. The chronology of the Port William stories is vast, spanning from the Civil War to 2021. Across his works of fiction, Berry unveils a tapestry of characters who occupy Port William and live in community with each other across

³⁹ Morris Allen Grubbs, “Wendell Berry: People, Land and Fidelity,” *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association* 10 (1995).

several generations. His fiction writing (and the characters therein) embody the virtues of small local communities that he finds to be essential to a fulfilling life. Berry writes the majority of his fiction in a simple and plain-spoken dialogue that reflects what he calls “the community speech, unconsciously taught and learned” of his own community in Kentucky.⁴⁰

Some of Berry’s broadest readership has come through his written essays. His essays are described as “both deeply personal and powerfully polemical,” and offer a comprehensive exploration of the interconnectedness of ecological, cultural, and ethical issues facing contemporary society. As with his poetry and fiction, he writes primarily through the lens of his localized place and experience. Across his essays he advocates for sustainable agriculture, stewardship of natural land, the strength of local communities and traditional values. He has also written autobiographical essays and essays on poetry.

Berry’s essays offer the frankest medium for him to express his criticisms of contemporary society. Key among his concerns are the issues of industrial capitalism and land-exploitative practices driven by greed. His 1977 book *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* is one of his best-known and most enduring works. The book contains a series of essays which speak to the destruction of America’s productive farmland by the industrialization of agriculture, favoring short-term gain through exploitative and unsustainable farming practices. Berry argues that the market-driven industrial farming techniques championed by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz have ultimately devastated America’s cultural and ecological health. The book is regarded as one of the key texts of the environmental movement in 20th century America. Its message, nearly 50 years old, remains timely and urgent in today’s society.

⁴⁰ Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words : Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 83

Poetry

Berry has been a prolific poet throughout his career, and his writing has been published in several volumes of poetry. As with his works of fiction and essays, Berry's poetic writing retains a regional sensibility. His poems are colored by the landscapes of his native Kentucky and give quiet attention to the natural world, celebrating the satisfactions of rural life. Andrew Angyal suggests that Berry's poetic writing works to unify life, work, and art within a coherent vision in his poetry, which includes "a regional sensibility, a farming vocation, the poetic voice of the farmer-husband-countryman, and a strong commitment to a localized environmental ethic."⁴¹

Berry developed his poetic voice among a generation of American poets in the 1960s who were largely disposing of traditional poetic forms in favor of developing a personal poetic idiom.⁴² For Berry, this idiom exists most commonly in a loose adherence to conventional lyric forms, modified as desired to fit his metrical style. He commonly writes in the first person within his poems. His writing is neither overly-formulaic nor highly experimental. As with his works of fiction, his poetry reflects the plainspoken community speech of his region.

Berry is wary of what he calls the "specialization" of poetry. He criticizes self-reflexive poetry that fails to relate to its author's community. Such specialization, Berry argues, divorces art (and culture itself) from the lived experiences of everyday life.

Culture has been reduced to art; art to the works of artists in museums, concert halls and libraries, which are patronized by non-artists in their leisure time. Thus both culture and art are divorced from work, from the everyday lives of most people, and from action. Culture and art are inactive, received passively in moments of leisure—a collection of consumer products to be used at discretion and then "disposed of" when the world seems to call for action.

Real—that is, living—art and culture, on the other hand, rise from and return to action, the slightest as well as the grandest *deeds* of everybody's everyday life.⁴³

⁴¹ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 117

⁴² Paul Merchant, *Wendell Berry* (Lewistown, ID: Confluence Press, 1991), 192

⁴³ Berry, *Standing by Words*, 87

Berry's poetic writing then is primarily focused on: 1) sharing what he believes to be true and 2) relating to (and existing within) his culture. His poetry is not divorced from his real life - it is *tied* to it. Berry the poet is Berry the farmer. To that end, he has at times used the persona of the "Mad Farmer" within his poetry to express his deepest satisfactions and passions garnered from a life of tending his farm, as well as his indignations at witnessing the diminishment of the land and his local community.⁴⁴

Roughly half of the poems surveyed in this paper come from Berry's *Sabbath* poetry. These poems mark something of a departure for Berry's poetic writing. They are notable for their use of traditional forms and their religious sensibility. Berry has written the *Sabbath* poems throughout his lifetime on Sunday mornings, and says the poems have been composed "in silence, in solitude, mainly out of doors." The poems embrace the spirit of the Sabbath: the overarching theme is the practice of human rest, coupled with the reminder that the living world carries on in its productivity without us. They are meditative and have a worshipful tone. Berry says the poems are about "moments when heart and mind are open and aware," and he advises that readers read them in the same manner in which they were written: "slowly, and with more patience than effort."⁴⁵

The *Sabbath* poems vary in length and utilize traditional metrical forms, including "rhymed couplets, terza rima, rhymed quatrains, longer stanzas employing interlocking rhyme, and the irregular ode."⁴⁶ The poems also incorporate a traditional Christian vocabulary and references to scripture, albeit in a manner which does not adhere to a strictly orthodox Christian theology. The allusions to hymns, grace, Eden, Paradise, Creation, Lord, God, Heaven, and resurrection are intertwined with religious pastoral imagery—A representation of Berry's own

⁴⁴ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 117

⁴⁵ Wendell Berry, *This Day* (Counterpoint, 2013), xx

⁴⁶ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 133

religious beliefs. Andrew Angyal describes this pairing as “reverent but unchurched,” deeply thoughtful but independent in spirit.⁴⁷ The *Sabbath* poems are ordered by year and are untitled; the majority of the *Sabbath* poem choral settings in this survey come from Berry’s first two large collections, *A Timbered Choir* (1998) and *This Day* (2013).

Recurring themes and motifs in Berry’s poetry

As with the overarching themes that span Berry’s entire body of writing, so too do we find recurring themes and motifs within his lyric poetry. These images often emerge from the pastoral landscapes that Berry conjures. In an effort to give the reader greater context when encountering the poetry within this study, the most commonly occurring themes will be addressed here, supplemented by comments offered from fellow writers, literary scholars, and Berry himself.

Place

In Berry’s poetry, “place” is both a subject unto itself and also a backdrop in which his poems are rooted. All of his poems are of a place. Most commonly, that place is the Kentucky landscape surrounding his home. His writing is colored by patient and quiet observations of the world around him, and illustrates the “long-term attention and devotion” that he values within poetry. Occasionally he refers to place specifically within his poetry. When he does so, it is valuable to understand the reverence with which he refers to it. In one of his Sabbath poems, for instance, he observes the near-invisibility of a frog at rest, blending in with its natural surroundings: “Its sign of being at home / There in its given place, and well.” The poem

⁴⁷ Ibid, 133

continues with Berry pondering his own sense of belonging, concluding that his place, too, is within the countryside where he lives: “At home, at ease, and well, / In Sabbaths of this place.”⁴⁸

Berry:

I am endlessly in need of the work of poets who have been concerned with living in place, the life of a place, long-term attention and devotion to a settled home and its natural household, and hence to the relation between imagination and language and a place.⁴⁹

Angyal, describing Berry’s poetic principles:

Most important, poetry should be rooted in a particular place. By its very nature, it is local and regional, inhabiting a particular physical landscape rather than a universal landscape of the mind.⁵⁰

Morris Allen Grubbs:

Berry’s premise, implicit, often explicit, in almost all of his work, is that we must have a particular place, must identify with it, must learn from it, must love it, must care for it. And only by living in this place long enough, and by attending to the knowledge of those who have lived there before us, will we fully realize the consequences of our presence there.⁵¹

Good work

Berry values good work as a virtuous, thoughtful, and affectionate act. Inspired by his lifetime of farming in Kentucky, Berry’s incorporation of manual labor within his poetry is quite common. Henry Taylor calls the presentness of labor the “ground bass” of many of Berry’s poems.⁵² Good work, to Berry, is an invitation into craftsmanship, affection, and service to one’s community. Poor work is that which is done without pleasure or affection, and that which creates a product that is neither useful nor beautiful. Berry says that this type of work dishonors “God, nature, the thing that is made, and whomever it is made for.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1998), 28.

⁴⁹ Berry, *Standing by Words*, 88

⁵⁰ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 117

⁵¹ M.A. Grubbs, “Wendell Berry”

⁵² Henry Taylor, “‘All Goes back to the Earth’: The Poetry of Wendell Berry,” *Southern Cultures* 7, no. 3 (2001), 45

⁵³ Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation,” 156

Berry's *Sabbath* poems, which dwell on themes of rest also call to the reader's attention to the work of the earth, or God's work. Berry often highlights the relationship between human work and God's work. There is a notion of surrendering one's work to the graces of nature and the work of the earth: "Great work is done while we're asleep" he reminds us.⁵⁴

Berry:

Good human work honors God's work. Good work uses no thing without respect, both for what it is in itself and for its origin. It uses neither tool nor material that it does not respect and that it does not love. It honors Nature as a great mystery and power, as an indispensable teacher, and as the inescapable judge of all work of human hands. It does not dissociate life and work, or pleasure and work, or love and work, or usefulness and beauty."⁵⁵

Berry:

Work connects us both to Creation and to eternity. This is the reason also for Mother Ann Lee's famous instruction: "do all your work as though you had a thousand years to live on earth, and as you would if you knew you must die tomorrow."⁵⁶

Angyal:

Central to his argument is the importance of meaningful work that enables us to take part in the cycles of nature rather than ignoring them by shifting work to labor-saving machines dependent upon petroleum energy. Meaningful work ensures human health, dignity, and self-reliance for individuals, families, and communities.⁵⁷

Circles / Cycles / Wheels

Berry uses cyclic imagery across much of his poetry, commonly depicted in the naturally occurring cycles of the years, seasons, and days. He writes about the continuities of birth, growth, life, decay, and death with a similar sensibility—existing within the natural cycles of the earth. The acceptance of death is a key component of Berry's philosophy, and his use of cyclic imagery allows him to emphasize its place within the natural scheme of life. His 1982 book of

⁵⁴ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 18

⁵⁵ Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," 156

⁵⁶ Ibid., 160

⁵⁷ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 87

poetry *The Wheel* is a collection of elegies, and is particularly filled with this imagery. His cyclic imagery is also often paired with dance imagery, which is addressed further below.

Jeffery Alan Triggs:

He prefers the cyclical notion of time held typically by “primitive” religions to the linear vision of time enshrined in Christian dogma...[Berry] has long been interested in cyclical time as manifested in days, in the seasons, and in generations.⁵⁸

Angyal, reviewing *The Wheel*:

The dominant image is of human life as a dance within the larger cycles of life, implying closure, completeness, and inclusion.⁵⁹

Jeffery Alan Triggs, reviewing *The Wheel*:

The Wheel (1982) refers by its title to the “Wheel of Life” of eastern religion, Berry’s favorite theme of the recurring life cycle and the cyclical notion of time.⁶⁰

Light and Dark Imagery

Berry uses light and dark imagery frequently within his poetry, often paired together.

Light and darkness are used to illustrate subjects of life and death, known and unknown, and the cycles of day and night. Berry’s poetry is not averse to darkness, but often *embraces* it. In one poem he writes “To know the dark, go dark...and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings.”⁶¹

When referenced in the context of nighttime, darkness symbolizes the qualities of human rest from labor, and the graces of the Earth. A short Sabbath poem reads “The seed is in the ground / Now may we rest in hope / while darkness does its work.”⁶²

Ashley Brown, in a review of *A Timbered Choir*:

There is a beautifully modulated imagery of light and dark, and in the background one senses an archetypal scheme of the Creation, Eden, the Fall, and Paradise that shapes the poet’s perceptions.⁶³

⁵⁸ Merchant, *Wendell Berry*, 188-189

⁵⁹ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 129

⁶⁰ Jeffery A Triggs, “Moving the Dark to Wholeness : The Elegies of Wendell Berry,” *Literary Review* 31, no. 3 (January 1, 1988): 279–92, <https://doi.org/10.7282/t3qz2cq0>.

⁶¹ Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 121.

⁶² Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 131

⁶³ Ashley Brown, “A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997,” *World Literature Today* 74, no. 1 (2000): 163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40155413>.

Lionel Barney, in a review of *A Timbered Choir*:

Sabbath's true image is an actual place, and to render it Berry uses familiar half metaphors—light and dark, wild and tame, dreaming and wakefulness—made particular by observation.⁶⁴

Dance

Berry commonly uses the image of a dance to illustrate the interconnectedness and harmonious relationships that exist within a community. Just as a dance requires many individuals to move in coordination, so too does each member of a community play a role in contributing to the collective well-being. Berry emphasizes the beauty of cooperation, mutual support, and shared responsibilities. The dance becomes a poignant illustration of the bonds that tie people together. Dance is often paired with cyclic imagery and used to represent the multi-generational “dance of life” within families and communities.

Morris Allen Grubbs:

Berry uses the dance metaphor throughout his poetry to describe harmony between humans and nature, between the living and the dead of a community, and between members of the living.⁶⁵

Grubbs:

Such an intertwinement of lives is a way of describing a traditional community dance, which is usually circular and cyclic and involves several couples, each partner relying on the other, each couple relying on other couples.⁶⁶

Berry, on local culture:

People at work in communities three generations old would know that their bodies renewed, time and again, the movements of other bodies, living and dead, known and loved, remembered and loved, in the same shops, houses, and fields. That, of course, is a description of a kind of community dance. And such a dance is perhaps the best way we have to describe harmony.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lionel Barney, “A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems,” *The Georgia Review* 53, no. 2 (1999).

⁶⁵ M.A. Grubbs: “Wendell Berry”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Berry, *Standing by Words*, 79

Marriage, Fidelity

Taken at their most literal, the words “marriage” and “fidelity” conjure images of one’s relationship to a spouse. Berry does use those words in their traditional sense, but also expands their usage to refer to one’s relationship with their family, their community, their land, and their obligations. Marriage is used both literally and metaphorically in Berry’s writing. The words connote a strength of commitment and investment that is central to Berry’s vision. They imply steadfast devotion and loyalty. He often uses these words and images alongside other words which depict one’s commitment and care for their community and place, such as *stewardship* and *husbandry*.

Berry, on Marriage (and circles/spheres):

Human reality, as I understand it, can be diagrammed as a series of concentric circles or spheres: nature, human economy and culture, household, marriage, and family. There is complex interdependency among all of these spheres, and each one and its connections with the others must be preserved. They must be kept together in some kind of union—consciously understood...loved, honored, and cherished—for which marriage, I suppose, is as good a metaphor as any.⁶⁸

Angyal, reviewing *The Country of Marriage*

These poems celebrate Berry’s central metaphor of marriage—to one’s spouse, family, home, vocation, farm, and region...Husbandry and marriage to the land are recurring tropes in Berry’s poetry, illustrated in clearing fields, sowing crops, planting gardens, tending livestock, mowing hay, and taking in the harvest.⁶⁹

Jebediah Britton-Purdy

For him, marriage is a chosen limit, a self-bounding, that helps to support and dignify all the other limits he recommends: restraint from violence, expression of an intentional community, of a deliberate bonding of souls...⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Merchant, *Wendell Berry*, 29

⁶⁹ Angyal, *Wendell Berry*, 124

⁷⁰ Britton-Purdy, “Wendell Berry’s Lifelong Dissent”

CHAPTER 3

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction

This chapter is designed so that it may be read in any order. Conductors seeking information on specific settings may peruse the chapter in whatever order best serves their research. Each choral work in this chapter is preceded by the poem it sets. The poem is presented in its original form and listed with its original date and book of publication. The bibliography is ordered by the number of choral works set to each poem. It begins with the most frequently set poems and gradually moves to poems which only have one choral setting. From there, the poems are ordered by their original books of publication, which allows for similar texts (like Berry's *Sabbath* poems) to remain grouped together.

Each choral work is reviewed in a one-page summary, providing readers with the following information: title, composer, poem, text usage, voicing, forces, vocal ranges, meter, key signature, difficulty level, duration, character words, publisher (and published number), date published, and notes. A few categories which merit further explanation are listed below.

Difficulty: This paper categorizes works into six levels of difficulty, which are: Easy, Medium-Easy, Moderate, Medium-Advanced, Advanced, and Professional.

Character Words: Two to three words that characterize the musical qualities of the work, often taken from the composer's own performance instructions.

Notes: One to three paragraphs of observations about the score from a choral conductor's perspective. These notes are intended to provide conductors with additional insights and contextual information about the work and its origin.

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Printed in: *Openings*

Published: 1968

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.⁷¹

⁷¹ Wendell Berry, *New Collected Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2012), 79. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild ThingsFrom: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - G#5

Alto: B3 - D5

Tenor: F#3 - D#4

Bass: F#2 - D#4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 2:30'

Character Words: lamenting, tense, dark

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

Composer John Newell uses persistent dissonances and extended chords to create a painfully rich setting of Berry's text. The work's opening bars from the piano have the essence of a funeral dirge: low sustained dissonances in the left hand, and octave eighth note pulses on G floating above everything in the right hand. The choir sings homophonically throughout the work, and Newell offers the performance marking *sempre sostenuto ed espressivo*. The music is entirely unrushed and slowly marches forward. The first lines of text are particularly full of unresolved dissonances in both the piano and chorus. Newell uses frequent minor seconds and major sevenths to create jarring harmonies delivered homophonically by the chorus. As Berry's text turns to images of rest ("I go and lie down"), Newell relents, replacing his clashing harmonies with lush extended chords, most commonly with added sevenths and ninths from the choir.

Though notated in A Major, the work is largely without a solidified tonal center. Voice leading is difficult and contains chromatic passages and awkward leaps. The work also requires a centered, supported tone from the choir that lasts through extended and unrushed musical phrases. The work is a fitting challenge for advanced choirs, and could offer great tonal variety to a concert program.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Nicholas White

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Organ

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5 (G5 for soloists)

Alto: A3 - A4

Tenor: D3 - F4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: 4/4, 5/4, 3/2

Key Signature: C Major, D Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 3:40'

Character Words: Ponderous, chant-like, mysterious

Publisher: NJW Music

Published: 2019

Notes:

Nicholas White's setting of "The Peace of Wild Things" is scored for organ and chorus, and is a work fitting for amateur church choirs and above. The writing for chorus is simplistic: multiple passages are sung in chant-like unison on a single pitch, and the remaining texture is largely chordal homophony, with a brief moment of imitation between trebles and tenor-basses. However, the organ offers a harmonic language that is ambiguous, characterized by unpredictable triadic harmonies and a recurring descending motif of an augmented triad. The work's harmonic language does find true resolution in D Major when the choir arrives at the final word of the poem: "free." The phrase "I am free" is repeated several times as two soprano soloists sing the descending motif first introduced by the organ (now sung as a major triad).

Due to White's thoughtful distribution of musical material for organ and chorus, this piece presents itself with musical nuance and harmonic complexity but is accomplishable for amateur choirs. The work calls for two soprano soloists, but they are featured only briefly and may sing from their positions within the choir. There are occasional three-part divisions for SA's and TB's, but no specification is provided on the specific voice part to split. Lastly, it should be noted that while the work is scored for organ, accompaniment could likely be accomplished by piano with little to no adaptation. In the YouTube performance recording that Nicholas White provides on his website, he plays piano with the choir in addition to the existing organ part, likely as a way to further harmonically support the singers.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Jenni Brandon

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: E3 - F4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Unlisted

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 6:00'

Character Words: Hopeful, sectional, fragmented

Publisher: Jenni Brandon Music / JB 149

Published: 2013

Notes:

Jenni Brandon wrote “The Peace of Wild Things” as a commission for the Brandywine Singers to premiere during their 20th Anniversary season. In the score’s liner notes, Brandon offers insight on both her interpretation of the text and her intentions for this composition: “I wanted to reflect Berry’s hopeful view...I tried to find a balance of joy and reflection in setting this poignant text.”⁷² The resulting work is an intriguing, highly sectional work for divisi SATB chorus that changes tempo, tonal center, and character frequently. Brandon’s writing is more sonic than it is melodic; the choral texture is largely homophonic and filled with cluster harmonies. No key signature is listed, and although the music briefly visits C Major in two passages, the work is largely without an established tonal center. Brandon’s phrases are notably short - at one point she even adds punctuation to the original text to merit a fermata, reading “I go and lie down where the wood drake, rests.”

This work is challenging due to its length, close voicings, and frequent shifts in tonality. Conductors will also face interpretive challenges to bring a sense of cohesion to the piece. It could be an appropriate challenge for advanced university and professional ensembles.

⁷² Jenni Brandon, “Program note” in *The Peace of Wild Things*, comp. Jenni Brandon (Jenni Brandon Music, 2012).

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Mark Sirett

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSA

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano I: Bb3 - G5

Soprano II: Bb3 - Db5

Alto: Ab3 - C5

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: Db Major, F Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 3:45'

Character Words: Sweeping, gentle

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes / 979-0-051-48468-3 Published: 2018

Notes:

Mark Sirett's setting of this Berry poem is an approachable and beautiful work for young treble choruses. The work begins in Bb minor, but Berry's words of growing despair and fear soon give way to the parallel key of Db Major, as the narrator retreats to lie down in nature. Beginning with the instruction *Andante*, the tempo markings gradually increase as the text continues, perhaps portraying a quickening of the narrator's footsteps. The work's peak comes at the fastest tempo, as voices repeat "I come into the peace of wild things" four times before the tempo begins to slow again. The work eventually returns to its initial tempo for the final line of text, bringing a sense of complete resolution to the work.

Sirett utilizes simple melodic writing, unison passages, and homophonic textures to create a piece that can be used in many middle school choral programs. An active piano accompaniment provides continuous harmonic support to the singers, and vocal phrases are short, no longer than three measures.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Jake Runestad

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - F#5

Alto: B3 - B4

Tenor: D3 - F#4

Bass: F#2 - C4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: E Minor, E Major, B Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4:30'

Character Words: Hopeful, building, resolved

Publisher: Jake Runestad / JR0036

Published: 2013

Notes:

Jake Runestad's "The Peace of Wild Things" is a work of steady building momentum from its dark and hushed first measures to its climactic and triumphant finish. Like many other settings of this text, the work has a notable turn in mood between the first lines of text which are shrouded in fear, and the remainder of the text which resonates in hope and beauty. Runestad illustrates this shift with both an increase in tempo and a turn from E minor to the parallel major. The momentum continues through with increased polyphony and divisions in each voice part, followed by another key change (B Major), which brings about the work's thematic climax: the chorus celebrates in unison "I rest in the grace of the world," repeated three times before settling and slowing with the continuation of the text: "and am free." Runestad creates a gorgeous harmonic fabric throughout the piece that is characterized by cluster chords and extended harmonies, particularly ninths.

This work is accomplishable for several types of choral ensembles. Its primary challenge lies in the independence required by all divided voice parts. Several times within the piece, divided voice parts carry separate rhythms. Conductors would be wise to make sure that their ensemble is balanced in voice parts (and divisi) as closely as possible when choosing to program this piece. The work also requires a skilled pianist, as it contains challenging writing for piano.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild ThingsFrom: *Appalachian Requiem*

Composer: Michael Conley

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAATTBB

Forces: Oboe

Ranges:

Soprano: Bb3 - G5

Alto: G3 - D5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: Eb2 - D4

Meter: 4/4, 6/4

Key Signature: G Minor

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 4:45'

Character Words: Atmospheric, meditative, somber

Publisher: See-A-Dot Music Publishing

Published: 2015

Notes:

Michael Conley's setting of "The Peace of Wild Things" is a part of his *Appalachian Requiem*, a multi-movement work for chorus, soprano soloists, and orchestra which reimagines the Requiem Mass as a lament for the losses of land, heritage, and culture caused by industrial desecration and mountaintop-removal mining in Appalachia. Berry's poem takes the place of the *Agnus Dei* within Conley's Requiem, which Conley describes as "not a plea for reconciliation with God, but rather with nature itself." Conley goes on to describe Berry's poem as "a powerful ode to the possibility that we can only be at peace with ourselves, and each other, when we find that calm, still place that communion with the natural world alone provides."⁷³

This setting is scored for eight-part chorus and oboe. Unlike other settings of this text, Conley's portrayal retains a central mood throughout the work: one that is atmospheric, steady-paced, and solemn. Small moments of tonal brightness poke through the minor fabric at times, but the overarching character is filled with heaviness and lament. The choral writing is dense, characterized by long sustained harmonies, cluster chords, and slow forward motion. The solo oboe carries the most active melodic and rhythmic material, and floats over the atmospheric texture created by the choir. This work is appropriate for advanced ensembles and poses challenges of intonation and balance.

⁷³ Michael Conley, "Program Note" in *The Peace of Wild Things*, comp. Michael Conley (See-A-Dot Music Publishing, 2015).

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Shawn Crouch

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: TTBB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Tenor I: D3 - G#4

Tenor II: B2 - G4

Baritone: B2 - D#4

Bass: F#2 - C#4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 5:00'

Character Words: Unsettled, dissonant, seamless

Publisher: Hal Leonard / 00198151

Published: 2016

Notes:

Shawn Crouch's TTBB setting of "The Peace of Wild Things" was commissioned by Chorus America for the Boston Children's Chorus, composed in memory of the victims of the 2013 Boston Bombing. Crouch says that in the years that have passed since the 2013 bombings, he has come to see the work as "a memorial against all violence in our society." The tonal landscape he creates is colored by his personal interpretation of the poem, which he shares in the score's liner notes: "Berry's text describes the uncertainty of the human condition that I have often felt in our violent contemporary times, and the fear of the world that our children will inherit when we are gone."⁷⁴

This a cappella work is challenging for its tonal ambiguity, independence of voice parts, overlapping phrases, and consistent use of dissonances, particularly minor seconds. Though the work has a notated key signature, the music largely operates outside of a given key, instead centering around certain pitches as momentary tonal centers. Close harmonies are frequent, and even as Crouch eases his use of dissonances within the work's core, he closes the piece with the return of a sustained minor second on the word "free," bringing a chilling lack of resolution at the work's close.

⁷⁴ Shawn Crouch, "Notes from the composer" in *The Peace of Wild Things*, comp. Shawn Crouch (Hal Leonard LLC, 2016).

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Emily Feld

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: Bb3 - Ab5

Alto: Ab5 - Eb5

Tenor: Db3 - Gb4

Bass: Gb2 - Db4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: Db Major, E Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:30'

Character Words: Gentle, searching, warm

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 1401

Published: 2016

Notes:

Emily Feld's "The Peace of Wild Things" is a lush and rich setting of Berry's text that evokes a character of searching and resolution. Rather than portraying Berry's first lines of despair and fear through the use of a minor mode, Feld suspends any sense of arrival through her harmonic choices. Though tonally centered in Db Major, the choir refrains from singing a tonic chord, instead moving to the submediant triad in a deceptive cadential motion (IV-V-vi) repeatedly. Feld also prolongs the sense of searching by recalling the first line of text ("When despair for the world grows in me") again in a moment of surprising modulation to E Major, which builds in momentum as the choir repeats the line over the course of a 10-measure crescendo. The work's climax comes with the delivery of the title line of text "I come into the peace of wild things," as the choir returns to Db Major, at last in harmonic progressions that incorporate a rooted tonic triad, evoking a character of resolution and peace.

This beautiful work should be accomplishable for many choirs. The choral writing is largely homophonic and voice leading is predictable. Much of the work is scored in a low tessitura, inviting a warm and rich choral timbre.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Sean Ivory

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA

Forces: Piano, Viola

Ranges:

Soprano I: B3 - A5

Soprano II: B3 - E5

Alto I: A3 - B4

Alto II: F#3 - A4

Meter: 4/4, 3/4

Key Signature: B Minor, D Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 6:00'

Character Words: Sectional, inventive, adventurous

Publisher: Walton Music / WW1780

Published: 2020

Notes:

Sean Ivory's setting of this Berry poem is a brilliantly creative work for treble chorus that is both cohesive and ever-changing. Like many other settings of this text, the work begins in a minor key and displays a shift in character between the poem's first three lines and the rest of the poem (which begins "I go and lie down"). However, Ivory's setting is notable for the changes in character it continues to display throughout the rest of the work. This is accomplished through changes in meter, pauses within the music, and a largely through-composed treatment of melodic material. Ivory also shows refreshing variety in the ways in which the piano and viola are utilized - neither conform to a single role or purpose, and both are used intermittently, weaving in and out of the existing musical fabric. The result is a setting of Berry's text that is creative and adventurous, perhaps illuminating the variety of "wild things" that the narrator encounters within the poem.

This work is challenging primarily for its demands of ensemble size and vocal range. At times the choir sings in eight-part divisi, and long sustained phrases require enough voices for seamless staggered breathing. The choral writing itself is approachable for most advanced treble ensembles, with largely homophonic writing, unison singing, and brief instances of imitative polyphony.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Matthew J. Olson

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - A5

Alto: B3 - D5

Tenor: F3 - G4

Bass: Db2 - D4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: C# Minor, D Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Soothing, warm

Publisher: Colla Voce LLC / 36-20184

Published: 2016

Notes:

Matthew J Olson's "The Peace of Wild Things" is a gentle and beautiful setting of Berry's text that would be appropriate for advanced high school ensembles and above. The work explores different harmonic colors and is characterized by lush cluster chords, suspensions, and extended harmonies. The piece begins in a quiet C# minor to portray the character of Berry's first three lines of fear and despair, but quickly blooms into the relative key of E Major (and shortly thereafter D Major) as the text continues. The choral texture is entirely homophonic aside from occasional pickup notes in the sopranos and sustained chords in the basses. Dynamic phrasing swells repeatedly to dramatic peaks, but never outside of a gentle character. Olson only indicates a *forte* dynamic once in the piece.

Olson's choral writing is beautiful and he uses predictable voice leading, making this work approachable for amateur choirs. The last thirteen bars of the work are notably more challenging harmonically with unexpected arrival chords from outside the key signature. The piece ends rather curiously on a Db Major chord. Divisi occurs frequently in the basses and occasionally across all other voice parts. Directors may utilize a high-middle-low split for tenors and basses to help balance the voice splits that are present in much of the work.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild ThingsFrom: *The Great Trees*

Composer: Gwyneth Walker

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano, clarinet

Ranges:

Soprano: F4 - Eb5

Alto: D4 - B4

Tenor: A3 - F4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: 4/4, 6/4

Key Signature: F Maj, C Maj, Bb Maj,
Eb Maj

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:20'

Character Words: Peaceful, steady, pulsating

Publisher: ECS Publishing / No. 7744

Published: 2009

Notes:

"The Peace of Wild Things" is the first movement of Gwyneth Walker's *The Great Trees*, scored for SATB chorus, piano, and clarinet. The setting is gentle and features animated writing for clarinet and piano, which accompany a simple and steady delivery of text from the chorus. In this movement, the clarinet portrays "a lone bird in flight," with spacious melodic leaps of major sevenths and perfect fifths that weave throughout the movement. The writing for chorus is largely chordal and simplistic, and contains three short vocal solos of soprano, alto, and tenor which first introduce the text. The choir sings in homophony and splits into an eight-part texture in a few select moments. The voice leading is simple and primarily moves by step. Walker creates a sense of forward momentum through a series of changing tonal centers, but the work begins and ends in F Major, which brings a sense of harmonic cohesion to the piece. It should be noted that the movement is designed to seamlessly transition into the second movement, which is scored for solo soprano. However, Walker provides an alternate ending which can be used by choruses who wish to perform this movement on its own.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild ThingsFrom: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - D5

Alto: A3 - G4

Tenor: F3 - G4

Bass: A2 - C4

Meter: 4/4, 6/4

Key Signature: F Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 3:00'

Character Words: Hymn-like, meditative

Publisher: Oolitic Music

Published: 2000

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's setting of "The Peace of Wild Things" is a simple and hymn-like setting of Berry's text. The work is scored for SATB chorus but primarily maintains a three-voice texture. It begins with a musical quote: the first five bars of the piece come from the Eastern Georgian Hymn "Shen Khar Venakhi" (You are a Vineyard). The rest of Dalglish's composition retains the character of this hymn - the choral texture is completely homophonic and colored by close harmonies (particularly major seconds) and suspensions. Phrases are short and delineated by notated breath marks and rests. The harmonic language is simple and colorful - Dalglish allows the tonal center to shift (beginning in C Major, then the notated F Major, and concluding in Bb Major), but does so gently and gradually, and the piece retains a consistent character that is meditative throughout.

Notably, the tenor voice in this work regularly doubles the alto and bass voice parts. There are only twelve measures in which the tenor sings independent notes. For smaller ensembles, this may prove to be advantageous, as this doubling essentially creates a three-part texture. However conductors should be aware of the balance issues this may present, as the tenor voice switches back and forth between the altos and basses.

Choral Title: The Peace of Wild Things

Composer: Joan Szymko

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

SSAA (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges: SATB

Soprano: Bb3 - Ab5 (optional Bb5)

Alto: Bb3 - Db5

Tenor: C3 - F4

Bass: Ab2 - Eb4

SSAA

Soprano I: Bb3 - Ab5 (optional Bb5)

Soprano II: Bb3 - F5

Alto I: F3 - Eb5

Alto II: F3 - Eb5

Meter: 4/4, 5/4, 3/2

Key Signature: Bb Minor, Eb Major,
Db Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:40'

Character Words: Ponderous, gentle, building

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 692, 561

Published: 2004, 2006

Notes:

Joan Szymko's "The Peace of Wild Things" is a ponderous and blooming setting of Wendell Berry's text available for both SATB and treble chorus. Szymko follows the imagery of Berry's text in the musical characteristics she portrays. The work begins in dark clustered harmonies, which build in density and volume and illuminate Berry's words like "despair" and "fear." Quickly, however, the piano sounds out gentle harmonies in the parallel major key, as the choir sings the pivotal line of text ("I go lie down") in a unison descending octave. For the duration of the piece, the piano provides harmonic support through arpeggiated triplets, which also cultivate a rhythmic sense of forward momentum. The choir grows in range and volume, and visits Eb Major and Db Major as tonal centers. The chorus concludes by singing Berry's last line of text in unison, with the same rhythmic spaciousness and simplicity of their first unison.

This work is accomplishable for many choral groups, and could be a suitable challenge for intermediate and community choruses. Szymko's writing is harmonically rich, and the choral texture shifts between homophony and simple polyphony. The vocal ranges are particularly demanding in the arrangement for treble chorus - conductors should consider the size and strength of their Alto section before programming this work.

Poem: I
from *Sabbaths*, 1979

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*
Published: 1998

I

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1998), 5.
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Choral Title: I Go Among Trees

Composer: Conner J. Koppin

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSATB

Forces: Piano, cello

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - B5

Alto: A3 - Db5

Tenor: C3 - E4

Bass: E2 - C4

Meter: 12/8, 9/8

Key Signature: Eb Major, Db Maj, B Maj

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 5:00'

Character Words: Pulsing, lilting, stirring

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc / 50600676

Published: 2015

Notes:

Conner J Koppin's setting of this Berry poem is characterized by a persistently stirring and pulsating momentum, which transforms and eventually softens throughout the work. The piece is in a lively 12/8; Coppin utilizes pulsating groups of eighth notes and dotted eighth notes to create a two-against-three texture, which creates a sense of forward momentum. A solo cello also weaves throughout the fabric of the piece. The choir's rhythmic activity is almost entirely homophonic, but likewise is built of rhythms constructed from triple and duple eighth note patterns. Brief moments of polyphony occur in blooming imitation on "Ah," as the narrator hears the "songs" of those he encounters in the wilderness. The work's gentlest moment comes in the final stanza: the pulsating rhythm of the piano slows and eventually dissipates, as the narrator finally hears his own song. The work closes with gentle groupings of eighth notes sung by the choir on "Oh," settling the work to rest and reflecting the text's closing line: "As we sing, the day turns, the trees move."

Koppin shifts the work's tonal center twice within the work, but voice leading is logical and predictable for singers. Soprano divisi is consistent for the work's duration and there are occasional splits for altos and basses. This work could be an exciting and accomplishable challenge for high school choruses and above.

Choral Title: I Go Among The Trees and Sit Still

Composer: William Campbell

From: *Among The Trees*

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - Eb5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: C3 - F4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: Eb Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 4:05'

Character Words: Reverent, gentle

Publisher: Swirly Music / WCL-001

Published: 2014

Notes:

William Campbell's setting is an accomplishable and simple delivery of Berry's poem, appropriate for amateur church choirs or high school ensembles. The work is in 4/4 and rhythms are very straight, almost entirely built of quarter notes and eighth notes. The writing is almost entirely homophonic. There are a few instances of weak syllables placed on strong beats, which creates an awkward challenge for natural text delivery. The work is in Eb Major but uses the parallel key of C minor in stanzas 2 and 3, in which the narrator witnesses fear in himself and in the creatures he encounters. A small vocal tessitura and simplistic structure makes this a very approachable piece for many ensembles.

Choral Title: I Go Among Trees

Composer: Giselle Wyers

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, minimal divisi

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - B5

Alto: B3 - C#5

Tenor: B2 - F#5

Bass: E2 - B4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: Eb Major, Db Maj, B Maj

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 5:35'

Character Words: Placid, mystic, wondrous

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 912

Published: 2009

Notes:

Giselle Wyers' "I Go Among Trees" is a wonder-filled setting of Berry's text appropriate for many advanced choruses. The tempo is never rushed and connotes a walking pace, and the melodic writing is sweeping and connected; Wyers uses performance terms like *placidly*, *sostenuto*, *with motion*, and *ardently* throughout the score. In the score's liner notes, the composer also shares her interpretation of the text: "In Berry's poem...the reader (or singer) goes through the process of viewing nature as something foreign and fearful, to recognizing it as part of oneself. As one recognizes their own true nature, they are able to 'sing' that out to the world."⁷⁶

One way in which Wyers portrays the narrator's re-framed perspective is through her use of tonal centers. The piece moves through three tonal centers. Each tonal center is first introduced in lydian mode, which creates a sense of wonder and roaming. In the narrator's encounters with wildlife, as his fear dissipates, the tonal language switches to Major, creating a harmonic rootedness that welcomes the song of each creature he encounters. The work concludes with the narrator hearing his own song - a gentle motif in B major that makes its way through all voice parts.

⁷⁶ Giselle Wyers, "About the poet" in *I Go Among Trees*, comp. Giselle Wyers (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2009).

Choral Title: I Go Among TreesFrom: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, minimal divisi

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5

Alto: B3 - C5

Tenor: G3 - F4

Bass: G2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: C Minor

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 2:15'

Character Words: Dissonant, chromatic, unresolved

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

Of the settings of this Berry poem presented within this study, John Newell's is perhaps the most distinct for its use of harmony. This short work is highly chromatic and filled with dissonant harmonies - intervals of a minor second, tritone, and major seventh are frequent between voice parts. Scored in a limited tessitura, the harmonies performed are also close in range. Chromatic voice leading occurs in all voice parts. Newell provides a key signature, but the piece is largely free of any tonal center. The setting is also distinct for its chant-like approach to rhythm. The meter changes almost every bar, but the eighth note pulse is constant, most commonly in groupings of two or three eighth notes. Notably, despite the work's advanced and pointed chromaticism, Newell indicates the tempo as "moving gently and easily," implying a sense of melodic levity that contrasts with its harmony. This work is challenging primarily because of its difficult harmonies and voice leading, but could make for an excellent piece of contrast on concert programs for advanced choirs.

Choral Title: I Go Among Trees

Composer: Earlene Rentz

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, minimal divisi
SSAA

Forces: A cappella

Ranges: SATB

SSAA

Soprano: C4 - F#5

Soprano I: C4 - F#5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Soprano II: C4 - D#5

Tenor: Eb3 - F#4

Alto I: A3 - Bb4

Bass: F#2 - C4

Alto II: F3 - Bb4

Meter: 2/2, 4/4

Key Signature: F Maj, G Maj, E Maj,
C Maj, Bb Maj

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:00

Character Words: Flowing, grand, repetitive

Publisher: Colla Voce Music / 15-96360, 15-96365 Published: 2007

Notes:

Earlene Rentz composed “I Go Among Trees” for the Meade County High School Concert Choir’s 2007 performance at the Kentucky Music Educators Association Conference, and has subsequently created a version for SSAA chorus as well. This setting for chorus is accomplishable for many intermediate choirs and contains colorful harmonies, shifting choral textures, and frequent modulations. The melodic writing in general is stepwise and utilizes predictable voice leading. Some modulations are abrupt, but vocalists are assisted by the piano accompaniment which outlines the harmonies in flowing eighth notes throughout the work. Rentz creates a recurring motive that symbolizes the “song” that the narrator hears from the various animals he encounters. Each occurrence of this motive acts as a musical point of arrival, and each time its choral texture is slightly more complex. The work begins in 2/2 but slows to 4/4 with the first “song” motive, where it remains for the rest of the piece, though Rentz calls for several moments of *ritardando* throughout the whole work.

This work is simple in its melodic content but colorful in harmonies, and may be a fitting challenge for intermediate choirs. The only technical challenge this work poses for conductors is the occasional vocal divisi it calls for - a few exposed passages call for four-part splits among tenors and basses. The SSAA arrangement calls for no divisi beyond the assigned four parts.

Choral Title: I Go Among TreesFrom *I Go Among Trees*

Composer: Robert Paterson

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, minimal divisi, SATB soli

Forces: Marimba (5-Octaves)

Ranges: SATB

Soprano: D4 - G5 (Solo A5)

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: Eb2 - D4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: C Major, F Major, Eb Major
Bb Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 8:10

Character Words: Swelling, sectional, virtuosic

Publisher: Bill Hollab Music

Published: 2019

Notes:

“I Go Among Trees” is the first movement of a three-movement work by Robert Paterson written for chorus and marimba. The full work, also titled *I Go Among Trees*, was commissioned by the New Amsterdam Singers in honor of the chorus’ 50th anniversary. Patterson chose to select poems that celebrate retreats into nature, picking Berry’s text along with poems by May Sarton and John Freeman. This movement introduces the full work, and features virtuosic writing for the marimba with lengthy solo passages, paired with chordal and lightly imitative writing for chorus.

The musical structure loosely follows Berry’s four-stanza structure, and recurring motifs help to bring a sense of cohesion to the work, particularly in repetitions of the “song” that the narrator describes. The rhythm is largely free and phrases are short, with a back-and-forth exchange between chorus and marimba in the presentation of new material. This rhythmic freedom contributes to the soloistic quality of the marimba, but neglects to establish any rhythmic consistency for chorus, and may pose a challenge for conductors. The harmonic language is also free, diatonic but roaming - Paterson explores many lush chordal sonorities and modulates several times throughout the work. The final stanza features a change in texture, as four soloists from the chorus sing in a scattered exchange of short recitative-like phrases while the choir sings in long tones.

Poem: X
 from *Sabbaths*, 1982

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*
 Published: 1998

X

The dark around us, come,
 Let us meet here together,
 Members one of another,
 Here in our holy room,

Here on our little floor,
 Here in the daylit sky,
 Rejoicing mind and eye,
 Rejoining known and knower,

Light, leaf, foot, hand, and wing,
 Such order as we know,
 One household, high and low,
 And all the earth shall sing.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 52. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Dark Around Us, Come

Composer: Giselle Wyers

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: A Cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - Ab5

Alto: A3 - Eb5

Tenor: D3 - G4

Bass: Eb2 - C4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: A minor, C minor

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 6:45'

Character Words: Solemn, broad

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 1516

Published: 2018

Notes:

Giselle Wyers creates a setting of Berry's text that itself explores textures of darkness and light. A small motif built of rising and falling dotted-16th and 32nd notes makes its way through SAT voices and carries a flowing, sorrowful melody. This motive weaves throughout a homophonic choral texture that is otherwise simplistic, with continuous slow pulses and emphasis on beats one and three. Wyers intensifies the harmonic and rhythmic language as the text continues, growing tonally ambiguous and increasing the rhythmic activity of each voice part (though still largely homophonic, and with a continuous pulse catered to strong beats). Wyers presents the entire text twice; upon the conclusion of Berry's third stanza, the form begins to repeat itself in the new tonal center of C minor. In both settings of the text, the third stanza "Light, leaf, foot, hand, and wing" marks a shift to a more hopeful texture. On the publisher's website, the work is described as such: "This piece embodies the sorrow of our failings to reconcile with the earth, but ends with a poignant hope and optimism, as is reflected in Berry's simple yet radiant text."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ "The Dark Around Us, Come," Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://sbmp.com/SR2.php?CatalogNumber=1528>

Choral Title: Come, Let Us Meet Here Together

Composer: J. David Moore

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi), S solo

Forces: A Cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5

Alto: B3 - D5

Tenor: D3 - G4

Bass: F2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Appalachian, fiddle music, rousing

Publisher: Fresh Ayre Music / FAM-0113-01

Published: 2019

Notes:

J. David Moore's setting shows the influence of Appalachian fiddle music in this exciting, dance-like work. The work begins with a single voice, joined shortly after by all treble voices in a chorale-like homophonic texture that feels largely free in tempo. The introduction of the tenors and basses brings about the work's core: an *Allegro* compound meter which alternates commonly between 9/8, 6/8, and 12/8. Upon reaching the words "and all the earth shall sing," the choir begins singing a Mixolydian melody on various neutral syllables. The melody makes its way through each voice part as the rest of the choir delivers accented and percussive harmonic accompaniment. As the composer says, "there's nothing left to do but dispense with language altogether and sing a barn-burning dance."⁷⁹

This work's difficulty comes primarily in its rhythmic complexity. Divisi is frequent, and while voice parts often share rhythms, individual entrances are common - an effect that creates a thrilling texture, but requires diligent reading and attention from choristers. Moore does not provide a key signature but the piece is largely tonal, primarily centered around G.

⁷⁹ J. David Moore, "Composer's Notes." Graphite Publishing, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://graphitepublishing.com/product/come-let-us-meet-here-together/>.

Choral Title: One Household, High and Low Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (no divisi, optional doubling)

Forces: A Cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: F4 - F5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: Eb3 - F4

Bass: Bb2 - C4

Meter: 2/2

Key Signature: F minor

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 1:45'

Character Words: Sacred Harp, declamatory, rousing

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 1436

Published: 2017

Notes:

This short setting of Berry's text is in the style of Sacred Harp singing. A fast-paced, rousing delivery of the text alternates between homophonic passages (first two stanzas) and imitative polyphony (last stanza). Maxfield manipulates the text order slightly so that the final stanza of the poem acts as a refrain, appearing between stanzas one and two and recurring three times total. This piece's limited vocal ranges and brief melodic material makes it a very approachable piece for many ensembles.

Conductors may experiment with choral techniques in the Sacred Harp tradition to emphasize the style of singing that Maxfield encourages. Some of the techniques are suggested by Maxfield: the first two notes in the Tenor are written with fermatas and may be used as starting pitches for the group, in which a leading voice sings and the ensemble joins in echo. This can be heard in several available recordings of this piece. The composer also notes that the tenor part (which carries the melody) may be doubled at the octave by sopranos if desired, and vice versa for tenors doubling the soprano part, creating a six-part texture.

Choral Title: The Dark Around UsFrom: *The Great Trees*

Composer: Gwyneth Walker

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: G3 - G4

Bass: Ab2 - Eb4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: C major, C minor

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 2:25'

Character Words: peaceful, growing, celebratory

Publisher: ECS Publishing / No. 7746

Published: 2010

Notes:

Walker's short setting of this text grows from a slow and peaceful hymn-like texture into a fast and celebratory conclusion. The work is largely homophonic and employs brief changes in texture, tonal center, and tempo as it develops. The text is presented in its entirety, and stanzas 2 and 3 are repeated a second time. Walker's harmonic language throughout the piece is ambiguous but not jarring. A quick departure from C major invites some tonal ambiguity; Walker notates the key of C minor but much of the harmonic language consists of major and minor seventh chords that briefly tonicize other tonal centers; this ambiguity is resolved emphatically in the work's final measures, which returns to C major. Walker sets the text in playful ways: using a back-and-forth staccato between treble and tenor-bass voices to deliver the line "light, leaf, foot, hand, and wing" (the composer notes "*lightly, as birds hopping*").

This work is quite accomplishable for many ensembles. Notably, Walker provides sections of optional accompaniment from the piano, which may be used if the choirs need support. The only passages that require piano explicitly are two instances in which the dynamic and rhythmic activity peaks, with independent piano writing adding to the texture.

Choral Title: All the Earth Shall Sing (The dark around us come)From: *Among The Trees*

Composer: William Campbell

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: Eb4 - Ab5

Alto: C4-C5

Tenor: Eb3 - Eb4

Bass: Ab2 - C4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: F minor, Ab Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 3:25'

Character Words: Mysterious, Hopeful, Joyous

Publisher: Swirly Music / WCL-001

Published: 2014

Notes:

Of the three settings in William Campbell's *Among The Trees*, this work shows the greatest influence of contemporary popular music. Campbell writes that the work "starts deceptively as a quiet chant that gradually opens up to a joyful chorus."⁸⁰ The first two stanzas of text are set by a sparking piano accompaniment which outlines repeating progressions in F minor, as the choir sings a chant-like melody that rises and falls. A color shift moves the chorus to the key of Ab Major, which remains through the rest of the work. The third stanza of text operates like a refrain, repeating four times before the work's conclusion.

Like the other settings in Campbell's *Among The Trees*, the choral writing is simplistic, largely homophonic, repetitive, and approachable for many ensembles. Select rhythms within this work are slightly more challenging than in the other movements (syncopation is frequent) but can quickly be taught on text and internalized by singers.

⁸⁰ William Campbell, "Composer's Notes" in *Among The Trees*, comp. William Campbell (William Campbell Music, 2014).

Choral Title: The Dark Around UsFrom: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAB

Forces: Hammered dulcimer, riq

Ranges:

Soprano I: D4 - A5

Soprano II: D4 - F#5

Alto: C4 - D5

Baritone: D3 - F#4

Meter: 4/4, 2/4, 6/8

Key Signature: A minor

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 1:40'

Character Words: Corraling, energetic, brisk

Publisher: Oolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

“The Dark Around Us” is the second song from Malcolm Dalglish’s song cycle *Hymnody of Earth*. Dalglish calls the work “the rousing call to congregate,” and offers that the choir should “step to the pulse of the music, look at the audience, and urgently engage them with the animated excitement of the gathering.”⁸¹ The writing for hammered dulcimer is brisk and energetic, accompanied by Riq, a Middle Eastern tambourine (Dalglish indicates that a regular tambourine may be used). The choir sings each stanza of Berry’s text quickly and energetically, beginning “like an urgent whisper” in unison and splitting to homophony with each short stanza. Fast syncopated rhythms create a sense of urgency and anticipation in the choral writing.

This work is scored for SSAB but may be performed by standard SATB ensembles by having all tenors and basses sing the baritone part, which sits within a D3-D4 octave outside of one F#4 quarter note. Unison singing is common, as is octave doubling between voices in moments of harmony. Because of its brevity (the choir sings 20 measures total), conductors may consider pairing this piece with another song on a concert program.

⁸¹Malcolm Dalglish, “Performance Notes” in *Hymnody of Earth*, comp. Malcolm Dalglish (Oolitic Music, 2005), 12.

Poem: I

from *Sabbaths*, 1986

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

I

Slowly, slowly, they return
To the small woodland let alone:
Great trees, outspreading and upright,
Apostles of the living light.

Patient as stars, they build in air
Tier after tier a timbered choir,
Stout beams upholding weightless grace
Of song, a blessing on this place.

They stand in waiting all around,
Uprisings of their native ground,
Downcomings of the distant light;
They are the advent they await.

Receiving sun and giving shade,
Their life's a benefaction made,
And is a benediction said
Over the living and the dead.

In fall their brightened leaves, released,
Fly down the wind, and we are pleased
To walk on radiance, amazed.
O light come down to earth, be praised!⁸²

⁸² Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 83. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Slowly, Slowly They ReturnFrom: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C#4 - A5

Alto: B3 - C#5

Tenor: C#3 - A4

Bass: F#2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: F# Minor

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 3:05'

Character Words: Wandering, flowing, open

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

This setting from John Newell's *A Timbered Choir* is a challenging and intriguing work for a cappella chorus that is suitable for advanced choirs. The music explores regular shifts in texture, alternating back and forth between unison singing or striking harmonies. As is true with other movements of Newell's larger work, this setting contains a key signature but is ultimately free of a tonal center. The music flows freely in speech-like pacing and follows the punctuation within the poem, arriving at longer notes wherever the text contains a comma or period. These moments of arrival point to the absence of a key center - Newell commonly uses pairings of fourths and fifths stacked closely to each other to create an ambiguously dissonant and open sound. In addition to the changes in texture and harmony, the choir also explores extremes of dynamic range, sometimes with abrupt shifts. The overall result is a three-minute work that wanders and flows freely through Berry's text without ever settling into a predictable meter, dynamic, or tonal center.

This work requires advanced singers due to its demands in range, divisi, and difficult melodic writing. Newell's harmonies are quite striking, and the work could offer great variety in color to a concert program.

Choral Title: Great Trees

Composer: Mary Alice Amidon

Arranger: Peter Amidon

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal bass divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: A3 - C5

Alto: A3 - A4

Tenor: G3 - C4

Bass: F2 - A3

Meter: 3/4

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2:10'

Character Words: Chordal, hymn-like, simple

Publisher: Amidon Music Publishing

Published: 1998

Notes:

Inspired by Malcolm Dalglish's choral setting of this Wendell Berry poem, Mary Alice Amidon created a simpler setting that she used for a singing class, which in turn was arranged for the Guilford Community Church Choir by her husband Peter. Like Dalglish's setting, the work sways in a lilting compound rhythm (notated here in 3/4, but performed in one). The writing for chorus is completely chordal, and each stanza follows a similar progression and melody, giving this setting the format and presentation of a hymn. Vocal writing is quite simple; tenors and basses never carry melodic content, and only provide harmonic support, often pedaling the same note for several measures. The piano accompaniment is quite simple as well, and alternates between homophonic struck chords and arpeggiated chords over the repeating progressions. This work is accomplishable for any SATB choir, and could easily be used in religious services - the work is published in the collection *Twenty-five Anthems for Interfaith & Community Choirs*.

Choral Title: The Timbered ChoirFrom: *The Great Trees*

Composer: Gwyneth Walker

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full (one word altered)

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano, clarinet

Ranges:

Soprano: Eb4 - Bb5

Alto: Bb3 - D5

Tenor: F3 - Bb4

Bass: G2 - D4

Meter: 4/4, 6/4, 2/4

Key Signature: G min, Eb Maj, F Maj,
Ab Maj, Db Maj, Bb Maj

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 3:30'

Character Words: Sectional, searching, rousing

Publisher: ECS Publishing / No. 7748

Published: 2009

Notes:

"The Timbered Choir" is the final movement from Gwyneth Walker's *The Great Trees* and is a rousing setting of Wendell Berry's text scored for chorus, piano, and clarinet. The composer calls this movement an expression of celebratory reverence. This celebratory character is perhaps the clearest at the work's conclusion, as the choir repeats "O light come down to earth be praised!" Much of the piece is spent in searching anticipation of this conclusion. The work's form is sectional - there are frequent shifts in tempo, texture, and key signature. Walker utilizes increases in tempo and dynamics to build to thematic peaks. The work goes through many key signatures and postpones a sense of true harmonic arrival until the final word of text ("praised"), which emphatically establishes Bb Major, the parallel major of the opening key (G Minor).

Of the three choral movements within *The Great Trees*, this work poses the most challenges, and is suitable for advanced high school choirs and above. The choral texture ranges from polyphonic to chordal, and divisi is frequent. Frequent and abrupt changes in key signature pose a larger challenge for singers as well. This piece may be performed on its own, but Walker notably references melodic content from an earlier movement ("The Dark Around Us") in the larger work, so a pairing of these movements may be advantageous for programming.

Choral Title: The Timbered Choir

Composer: William Weinmann

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SAB

Forces: Piano, flute

Ranges:

Soprano: Bb3 - F5

Alto: A3 - D5

Bass: A2 - D4

Meter: 3/2

Key Signature: F Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2:50'

Character Words: Hymn-like, repetitive, anthem

Publisher: William Weinmann

Published: 2017

Notes:

William Weinmann's "The Timbered Choir" is a simple and lovely setting of Berry's text that may serve as a suitable anthem for church choirs. Set in 3/2 and scored for chorus, piano, and flute, this brief work follows the format of a Hymn to set Berry's five stanzas of text. The melody is the same for each stanza, but the scoring varies with each. The melody is sung first in by the men, then the women, then in an echo call-and-response, then in an a cappella 3-part harmony, and finally in unison with a soprano descant. The writing for piano is very simple, outlining the underlying chord progression. Weinmann also provides chord changes within the score, allowing for the addition of other instruments or embellishments from the piano. This simple work is accomplishable for choirs of all abilities, and its repeating 8-bar melody can quickly be taught by rote, offering the possibility of incorporating the audience or congregation into the performance.

Choral Title: A Timbered Choir

Composer: David Evan Thomas

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB double choir

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: A3 - Bb5

Alto: G3 - Eb5

Tenor: C3 - F#4

Bass: E2 - D4

Meter: 3/2

Key Signature: G Major, D Minor, Bb Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 5:05'

Character Words: Sonic, grand, unhurried

Publisher: David Evan Thomas

Published: 2005

Notes:

David Evan Thomas's "A Timbered Choir" is an impressive and ever-changing setting of Wendell Berry's text, scored for SATB double choir. The work's musical characteristics change repeatedly throughout the work, delineated by pauses, shifts in texture, and changes in tonal center. Most of these changes correlate with the beginning of a new stanza from Berry's poem. The final stanza is notable for its harmonic simplicity - the work feels its most settled in Bb Major, and Berry's final line of text ("O light come down to earth, be praised!") is sung repeatedly as a connective thread in gentle imitation. Across this work, the piece also retains overarching musical characteristics that give the work a sense of cohesion, specifically: legato articulation, unhurried slow tempos, and grand moments of arrival colored by extended harmonies.

By its construction alone, this work caters itself to advanced ensembles, and would be fitting for university or professional choirs. It should be noted that though the score begins in a double choir format, the majority of the work remains in a standard SATB divisi format, and thus does not necessarily require an antiphonal or "two choir" standing formation from the choral ensemble. Homophonic passages are typically sung in divisi voicings, but the texture lightens to four-part voicings for polyphonic writing. The work is demanding primarily for the vocal maturity it requires, due to its long phrases and sustained cluster harmonies.

Choral Title: Great Trees
 From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano I: D4 - G5

Soprano II: C4 - E5

Alto: G3 - C4

Baritone: D3 - E4

Meter: 6/8, 9/8

Key Signature: G Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 2:30'

Character Words:

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's "Great Trees" is a short and intricate setting of this Wendell Berry poem, set in a five-verse form. This work was the inspiration for Mary Alice Amidon's choral setting of the same text, as she aimed to create a simpler arrangement for chorus (her setting is markedly different but contains the compound dance-like rhythms of Dalglish's work). Similar to other settings of this text, Dalglish utilizes a verse format to set the five even stanzas of text. Rhythmic patterns and articulations alternate between each stanza: verses two and four share speech-like rhythms and legato phrasing, and verses three and five contain strict dance-like rhythms. As with several of Dalglish's settings within *Hymnody of Earth*, this work is entirely homophonic, and may be best suited for a small chamber ensemble. Depending on the size of the ensemble, a conductor may not be needed for performance. The music is scored in G Major and retains its tonal center throughout, but Dalglish varies the harmony of each verse, "in keeping with the imagery of the poem."⁸³

⁸³ Dalglish, *Hymnody of Earth*, 78.

Poem: The Wild Geese

Printed in: *The Country of Marriage*

Published: 1973

The Wild Geese

Horseback on Sunday morning,
 harvest over, we taste persimmon
 and wild grape, sharp sweet
 of summer's end. In time's maze
 over the fall fields, we name names
 that went west from here, names
 that rest on graves. We open
 a persimmon seed to find the tree
 that stands in promise,
 pale, in the seed's marrow.
 Geese appear high over us,
 pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
 as in love or sleep, holds
 them to their way, clear,
 in the ancient faith: what we need
 is here. And we pray, not
 for new earth or heaven, but to be
 quiet in heart, and in eye
 clear. What we need is here.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 180. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Wild Geese
 From: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: The Wild Geese

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - F#5

Alto: C#4 - D5

Tenor: D3 - F#4

Bass: E2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: E Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 3:00'

Character Words: steady, haunting, restful

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

John Newell's "The Wild Geese" is an intriguing and colorful setting of Berry's text for chorus and piano. Much of the work is set in a very minimal scoring: the chorus sings in unison as the piano plays steady eighth notes, marked *sempre legato*. Shifts in meter are frequent, giving textual rhythms the pacing of chant. The work begins in E Major, but gradually shifts away from a tonal center as Newell introduces non-chord tones with increasing frequency. An abrupt shift in texture comes with the line "Geese appear high over us," as the choir splits to six-part harmony. The choir's harmonies bring a new brightness to the work, and show the influence of jazz harmonies, particularly 6/9 chords. The harmony continues to exist outside of the notated key signature until the line "what we need is here" which resolutely returns the choir to E Major. The work ends in the same scoring of unison singing and steady eighth notes - this time remaining in the key until the work's close.

This work may be accomplishable for many choruses, and could be a wonderful option for small chamber choruses given its limited vocal scoring. Aside from the last chord, choral divisi never splits more than six voices, thus a high-middle-low split may be useful for treble and tenor-bass voices.

Choral Title: The Wild Geese
 From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: The Wild Geese

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: Unison Treble

Forces: Hammered dulcimer, bodhran

Ranges:

Unison Treble: F#3 - D5

Meter: 4/4, 6/4

Key Signature: B minor

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 3:30'

Character Words: Strong, chant-like, marching

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1994

Notes:

Scored for unison treble voices, Malcolm Dalglish's "The Wild Geese" is a musical journey of Berry's text. Dalglish describes the setting as such: "In song, these words become a high unison descant that resolves into a chant-like prayer." Indeed, the vocal writing alternates between text-driven rhythms sung on a single note and long lyrical phrases which expand upward in range. The latter half of the work is particularly driving, with steady bass hits from the bodhran and a pulsing rhythm from the voices sustaining a single pitch. The work is powerful, beginning in a meditative character and concluding like a call to action as the choir repeats Berry's refrain: "what we need is here."

This work is accessible for most treble choruses, and could be a wonderful piece for cultivating a unison sound amongst singers. Its primary challenges lie in the instrumentation. Unlike other songs within *Hymnody of Earth*, the hammered dulcimer is harder to replace in this movement, as the writing is particularly idiomatic and calls for techniques like a "Koto bend" (pitch bend) and plucked strings.

Choral Title: Here

Composer: Joan Szymko

Poem: The Wild Geese

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA

Forces: Piano, violin

Ranges:

Soprano I: B3 - F5

Soprano II: B3 - E5

Alto I: A3 - D5

Alto II: F#3 - C5

Meter: 4/4, 2/4, 3/2

Key Signature: C Major, D Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 5:15'

Character Words: Spinning, brisk, poignant

Publisher: Roger Dean Publishing / 15/2446R

Published: 2008

Notes:

Joan Szymko's "Here" is a brisk work for SSAA chorus filled with liveliness and poignancy. The work is filled with an undercurrent of repetitive sixteenth notes in the piano, accompanied by a soaring violin part which enters and exits the texture freely with passages of sixteenth notes, double stops, and dotted rhythms. The writing for chorus uses quick and syllabic rhythms, interspersed with long sustained notes. The choral texture alternates between passages of unison writing, homophonic groupings, and four-part polyphony. In two instances the tempo slows and the texture thins - a stark contrast from the established quick rhythms. In both of these moments, the choir sings Berry's words of reflection: "in the ancient faith: what we need is here." This contrast in pacing and texture beautifully captures the overarching character in Symko's setting: filled with excitement, busyness, and wonder, and yet also spacious, still, and reflective.

Symko's harmonic language is somewhat ambiguous, and plays between the relative major and minor keys of the key signatures she provides. The writing for chorus, however, is logical and predictable. The majority of the choral challenges lie in the rhythmic writing and the moments of polyphony, which peak in difficulty near the end of the work. This work could be accomplished by advanced high school treble choruses and above. Conductors should note that the first slow section briefly calls for a solo vocal quartet, which is sung a cappella and requires strong vocalists.

Choral Title: What We Need is Here

Composer: Earlene Rentz

Poem: The Wild Geese

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano, optional Oboe / C-Instrument

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5

Alto: C4 - Bb4

Tenor: F3 - D4

Bass: A2 - C4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: C Major, D Major, F Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Simple, flowing, hymn-like

Publisher: Carl Fischer Music / CM9506

Published: 2017

Notes:

Earlene Rentz's "What We Need is Here" was commissioned for the 2015 Kentucky ACDA SATB Honor Choir. The work is a simple yet varied piece for chorus that was constructed for students and offers teaching opportunities within the work. Rentz shares in an editor's note: "Singers will connect with their own passion for beauty as they sing about the earth, sky, and humanity. The long phrases and tone quality allow students to create many musical 'events' as they travel through nature."⁸⁵

A simple choral texture and short phrases make this piece accessible to nearly all SATB ensembles. The vocal writing alternates between homophony and two-part textures. Occasionally the treble staff splits into three-part splits between sopranos and altos, but vocal assignments are not specified and thus left to the conductor. The piano writing is busier than the choral texture and consists of flowing sixteenth notes. Rentz also includes an optional instrumental part for Oboe or another C-instrument, which creates a lovely addition to the musical texture. Near the end of the work, Rentz uses the text "What we need is here" as the basis for a hymn-like section which the choir performs twice (sung a cappella the second time).

⁸⁵ Earlene Rentz, "Editor's Note" in *What We Need is Here*, comp. Earlene Rentz (Carl Fischer, LLC, 2012).

Choral Title: What We Need is Here

Composer: James Deignan

Poem: The Wild Geese

Text Usage: Excerpted

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)
TBB

Forces: Piano

Ranges: SATB

Soprano: Db4 - Ab5

Alto: Ab3 - Db5

Tenor: Db3 - Eb4

Bass: Fb2 - C4

TBB

Tenor: Eb3 - G4

Bass I: Db3 - Eb4

Bass II: Ab2 - Db4

Meter: 6/8, 3/8, 9/8

Key Signature: Gb Major (SATB)
Ab Major (TBB)

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Song-like, unhurried, meditative

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / 1593-2, 1414-2

Published: 2020, 2016

Notes:

James Deignan's "What we need is here" is a beautiful setting of Berry's text that is simple in structure but mature in vocal scoring. Deignan has arrangements for SATB and TBB choirs, and both prominently feature a soloist. Notably, this work only sets the second half of text from Berry's poem "The Wild Geese" rather than presenting the poem in its entirety. Deignan uses this to his advantage, dividing the nine lines of text into "verses," each concluding with the same musical and textual motive: "what we need is here." The first five lines of text are sung by the soloist, then again by the choir. The writing for piano is simple and chordal (Deignan writes "like bells"), and assists the choir in keeping the large beats aligned as texture expands. The second verse is constructed in a looping four-bar harmony, in which each additional voice adds a melody to the growing texture. The work concludes as it begins - with gentle hums and "oo"s from the choir as the piano chimes out chords in large beats.

The two arrangements of this piece vary in their scoring. The TBB arrangement remains in a three-part texture for the chorus the entire time; the soloist acts as a fourth voice in the looping second verse. The SATB arrangement contains much more divisi throughout and has a richer (and more challenging) texture. Both arrangements sit low in a range for tenors and basses for much of the work, and require diligent attention to intonation and uniformity in tone.

Poem: Song (4)

Printed in: *The Wheel*

Published: 1982

Song (4)

for Guy Davenport

Within the circles of our lives
we dance the circles of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
the cycles of the moon
within the circles of the seasons,
the circles of our reasons
within the cycles of the moon.

Again, again we come and go,
changed, changing. Hands
join, unjoin in love and fear,
grief and joy. The circles turn,
each giving into each, into all,
Only music keeps us here,

each by all the others held.
In the hold of hands and eyes
we turn in pairs, that joining
joining each to all again.

And then we turn aside, alone,
out of the sunlight gone

into the darker circles of return.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 302. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Circles of Our Lives

Composer: David L. Brunner

Poem: Song (4)

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SA, minimal divisi

TTBB, minimal divisi

SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

SA

Treble I: C4 - G5

Treble II: B3 - E5

TTBB

Tenor I: C3 - C5

Tenor II: C3 - F4

Bass I: B2 - D4

Bass II: C2 - C4

SATB

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: C4 - E5

Tenor: C3 - E4

Bass: G2 - D4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:00'

Character Words: Unhurried, spinning, repeating

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Published: 2000, 2006, 2015

Notes:

“The Circles of Our Lives” was commissioned for children’s chorus in 2000 by the Endowment Fund of the American Choral Directors Association in honor of Raymond W. Brock. Since publishing the two-part treble arrangement, composer David Brunner has arranged and published the work for TTBB and SATB ensembles as well. All of the arrangements retain a character that is simple and lyrical, built of small melodies that repeat and develop throughout the work. Brunner calls the setting “predominantly syllabic,” noting “there should be a flow and shape to the melodic line. Sing in a legato fashion and use the text to shape the expansive melodic ideas.”⁸⁷ Much of the choral singing is in unison, breaking into harmony at the ends of phrases or in moments of imitation. Notably, Brunner treats Berry’s second stanza as a sort of refrain: he chooses to begin with the second stanza before presenting the text in order, so its second appearance acts as a motivic return within the music. The musical character is consistent throughout this work - unhurried, flowing, and filled with repeating melodic motives.

⁸⁷ David Brunner, “Program Note” in *The Circles of Our Lives*, comp. David. L. Brunner (Boosey & Hawkes, 2000).

Choral Title: Within the Circles of Our Lives **Composer:** Giselle Wyers

Poem: Song (4) **Text Usage:** Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi) **Forces:** A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - F#5

Alto: G3 - D#5

Tenor: C#3 - F#4

Bass: F#2 - B3

Meter: 4/4 **Key Signature:** A Major, E Major

Difficulty: Moderate **Duration:** 4:30'

Character Words: Dance-like, repeating, graceful

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 1395 **Published:** 2016

Notes:

“Within the Circles of Our Lives” is a playful setting of Wendell Berry’s “Song (4)” that incorporates dance-like rhythms and repetitive melodies to illuminate the text. The musical character is filled with levity and grace. The choral texture is primarily polyphonic but remains spacious, as some voice parts remain quite simple. For instance, basses repeat the word “circles” on ascending intervals in a syncopated rhythm, acting as a sort of instrumental bass line for much of the work. Syncopated melodies (primarily in the treble voices) rise and fall gracefully, first in unison and later in echoed imitation. Occasionally choral texture will align homophonically or reach a dynamic peak, but the syncopated bass line returns and the dance-like setting resumes. The final line of text is musically set at a slower rhythm, and the choir concludes in a character that is more reflective, as gentle echoes of syncopated rhythms fade away in the treble voices.

This work can be accomplished by many ensembles, and could be an appropriate challenge for intermediate or advanced high school choirs. The “bass line” motive in the basses requires pristine tuning and attentiveness - intervals shift from fifths to sixths to fourths as the harmony progresses. The choral voicing remains four-part for the majority of the piece, but the final fifteen measures include a separate part for Soprano 2. Similarly, ten bars call for a split in the basses near the end of the work.

Choral Title: Circles

Composer: Dave Brubeck

Poem: Song (4)

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: Bb3 - Gb5

Alto: Bb3 - D5

Tenor: D3 - F4

Bass: F2 - Eb4

Meter: 4/4, 6/8, 3/4

Key Signature: Eb Major, Bb Major,
Ab Major

Difficulty: Medium-advanced

Duration: 3:45'

Character Words: Undulating, jazz-inspired, chromatic

Publisher: Alfred Publishing Co, Inc. / LG53056 Published: 1996

Notes:

Dave Brubeck's "Circles" is a chromatically dense and jazz-colored setting of Wendell Berry's text for SATB chorus and piano. Berry's text evokes circular imagery as it ponders the seasons of the natural world and the cycles of life. Brubeck does much to conjure this imagery melodically, noting "If you look at the 'Circles' score you will see that the notes for women's voices gradually curve up and then down, while on the staff below the men sing in a curve down and then up, so that the two staves put together form a visible circle."⁸⁸ Similarly, Brubeck uses triple meter and compound time signatures to give the work a dance-like rhythm. Berry's text is set in full, but Brubeck gives particular focus to the line "only music keeps us here," which he sets as "a grand waltz" in the middle of the work. The final lines of text are delivered "mournfully" and slower, and bring a sense of closure to the undulating music that precedes it.

Brubeck's writing is complex and filled with chromatic melodies, dissonant leaps, and extended harmonies. This work may be a fitting challenge for advanced choruses or vocal jazz ensembles. The piano part largely doubles the writing for chorus, which can assist singers with intonation challenges. The work is permanently out of print, but still sold digitally through Alfred Music online.

⁸⁸ Dave Brubeck, "Program Notes" in *The Wheel*, comp. Dave Brubeck (Alfred Publishing Co., 1996).

Choral Title: Within the Circles of Our Lives
From *Missa Gaia*

Composer: Libby Larsen

Poem: Song (4)

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano (orchestral reduction)

Ranges:

Soprano: C#4 - F#5

Alto: Bb3 - E5

Tenor: D3 - F#4

Bass: F2 - F#4

Meter: 4/4, 6/4, 3/4

Key Signature:

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 4:45'

Character Words: Free, chant-like,

Publisher: E.C. Schirmer Music / 6830

Published: 1992

Notes:

“Within the Circles of Our Lives” is the first movement of Libby Larsen’s *Missa Gaia: Mass For the Earth*, scored for SATB chorus, oboe, percussion, 4-hand piano, and string quartet. The work observes the relationship between human beings and the Earth, and draws its texts from the Bible, Native American poets, mystic theologians, and contemporary poets including Wendell Berry. This movement serves as the Introit to the Mass and introduces the theme of circles, which permeates the entire work. Larsen shares: “The music uses the circle of fifths both as a melodic theme and as an instrumental motive.”⁸⁹ The circle is a central image of several of the other texts within this work. Larsen has written an arrangement of this movement for chorus and piano which may be performed independently of the fully orchestrated version. She has also arranged this movement for Wind Band with Soprano and Bass soloists (this arrangement is currently the only reference recording available online).

The movement is characterized by leaping melodies of ascending fifths and descending fourths. Larsen’s harmonies are striking and complex, and voice leading is challenging. This work is likely best suited for collegiate and advanced vocal ensembles.

⁸⁹ Libby Larsen, “Missa Gaia: Mass for the Earth” Libby Larsen, Composer, Accessed February 29, 2024, <https://libbylarsen.com/works/missa-gaia-mass-for-the-earth>.

Poem: VIII

from “Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer”

Printed in: *Farming: A Hand Book*

Published: 1970

VIII

When I rise up
let me rise up joyful
like a bird.

When I fall
let me fall without regret
like a leaf.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Wendell Berry, *Farming: A Hand Book*, (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 57.

Choral Title: Like a Leaf

Composer: Elizabeth Alexander

Poem: VIII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: A3 - F5

Alto: A3 - F5

Tenor: A2 - F#4

Bass: G2 - F4

Canon Ranges: (unison)

SA: A3 - D5

TB: A2 - D4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: D Major, F Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:25'

Character Words: Joyous, Sweeping, Lifting

Publisher: Seafarer Press / SEA-153-00

Published: 2021

Notes:

Elizabeth Alexander's setting presents a sweeping, largely-pentatonic melody that is accomplishable for many SATB choirs. Notably, the score comes with a 2-6 part round, which presents the melody and text in their entirety. The melody tastefully ascends on the words "When I rise up let me rise up joyful like a bird" and descends on "When I fall let me fall without regret like a leaf." This round may be performed separately and could be a useful method to introduce singers to the full score, which is built around the same melody.

Within the full score, the melody is first presented in the Tenors and Bases and then performed as a two-part round between SA and TB. A brief moment of changing tonality removes us from the established pentatonic character, soon accompanied by a slowing of tempo, and ultimately leading to the new key of F Major, in which the chorus sings the initial melody again (presented by the Altos) in its most developed and orchestrated form. There is brief division in the final section but Alexander writes a note to redistribute singers as needed so that lower voices have enough support.

Choral Title: And When I Rise

Composer: Wendy Tuck

Arrangers: Peter Amidon, Zara Bode

Poem: VIII

Text Usage: Adapted

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Optional piano

Ranges:

Soprano: A3 - B4

Alto: A3 - G4

Tenor: D3 - D4

Bass: G2 - B3

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 1:00-3:00'

Character Words: Simple, repeating, hymn-like

Publisher: Amidon Music Publishing

Published: 2022

Notes:

This work for chorus is based around a simple repeating 16-bar melody, first written by Wendy Tuck. Amidon Music has published three free arrangements of this melody for chorus, two by Peter Amidon and one by his daughter-in-law Zara Bode. One arrangement is for a cappella chorus and two incorporate piano. The arrangements are all very simple, and the hymn-like choral writing is largely the same in each arrangement. By downloading the arrangement from the Amidon Music website, conductors will receive all three arrangements, and it is clear that conductors may utilize and combine elements from all three as desired. In his arrangement for piano and chorus, Amidon encourages directors to use the arrangement as a starting point for their own arrangements. Amidon also suggests that this piece may be sung in a call and response fashion.

This work can be taught as a simple choral exercise for SATB groups, and could be introduced entirely by rote if desired. The harmony follows a simple chord progression which repeats twice, and the entire 17-bar phrase may be repeated as many times as desired. The piece could serve as a simple closing refrain to a concert program.

Choral Title: When I Rise Up

Composer: J. David Moore

Poem: VIII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: 3-part round

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

SA voices: D4 - E5

TB voices: D3 - E4

Meter: 9/8

Key Signature: G Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Approx 2:00'

Character Words: lilting, repeating

Publisher: Fresh Ayre Music

Published: 2010

Notes:

This eight-bar melody from J. David Moore is constructed as a 3-part round for chorus, and can be taught entirely by rote to choirs of all ages. The melody can be found in Moore's *A Little Book of Rounds*, which includes another round that incorporates Berry's poetry ("Make Me One"). The melody is written in 9/8 and covers just above an octave in range, relying primarily on the notes of the pentatonic scale. The full 3-part texture is remarkably full and can be sung several times.

Moore offers conductors complete flexibility in their treatment of this round, offering suggestions for turning the rounds of his book into "concert miniatures." He offers suggestions including: changing the key, solo/tutti performance forces, spatial separation, inclusion of melodic and percussion instruments, and singing with the audience.

Poem: The Wheel

Printed in: *The Wheel*

Published: 1982

The Wheel

for Robert Penn Warren

At the first strokes of the fiddle bow
 the dancers rise from their seats.
 The dance begins to shape itself
 in the crowd, as couples join,
 and couples join couples, their movement
 together lightening their feet.
 They move in the ancient circle
 of the dance. The dance and the song
 call each other into being. Soon
 they are one—rapt in a single
 rapture, so that even the night
 has its clarity, and time
 is the wheel that brings it round.

In this rapture the dead return.
 Sorrow is gone from them.
 They are light. They step
 into the steps of the living
 and turn with them in the dance
 in the sweet enclosure
 of the song, and timeless
 is the wheel that brings it round.⁹¹

⁹¹ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 298. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Wheel

Composer: David L. Brunner

Poem: The Wheel

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, minimal divisi

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - G5

Alto: A3 - E5

Tenor: B2 - F#4

Bass: B2 - E4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: C Major, E Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 5:20'

Character Words: Majestic, Dance-like

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes / M-051-47523-0 Published: 2006

Notes:

David Brunner beautifully sets the character of Berry's poetry in this five-minute work. The work's introduction effectively portrays the rising of the dancers from their seats. The center of the work is primarily in 3/4 and has a dance-like movement. Though notated in simple meter, the 3/4 time signature harkens a roundness that parallels many of the rounded words Berry uses, such as: circle, dance, wheel, round, return. Brunner labels one section "gracefully" and indicates it should be felt in one. The choral texture is primarily homophonic, with instances of polyphony in 3/4 that conjure the image of individual dancers who branch out and eventually realign. Brunner alternates between the keys of C Major and E Major repetitively, but the work feels its most resolved in E Major - his harmonic language in C Major is less rooted. Indeed, the work concludes in a slower, meditative texture that is comfortably grounded in E Major.

Choral Title: The Wheel

Composer: Dave Brubeck

Poem: The Wheel

Text Usage: Full with small modifications,
additional text added

Voicing: SATB, moderate divisi

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - G5

Alto: C4 - E5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: F2 - C4

Meter: 4/4, 6/8

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 3:30'

Character Words: Animated, American folk, dance-like

Publisher: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc. / 32723

Published: 1996

Notes:

Dave Brubeck's "The Wheel" is filled with dance-like imagery in its portrayal of Berry's text. Notably, Brubeck adds additional text which is interspersed within the original poem and illustrates the setting of a square dance ("...bow to their partner promenade, do-si-do and away we go..."). In the score's liner notes, Brubeck explains that Berry's first line of text "evokes the music of my childhood in rural California when my parents still danced the traditional steps of the reel and square dance."⁹² The composer captures this style of music by treating the voices as instruments, singing on onomatopoeic words such as "zing" "chang" and "plunk" to various rhythms. Stacked fifths are also common in the harmonies, imitating the open strings of a fiddle. The work also contains a musical quotation of the American folk tune "Turkey in the Straw." The choral texture is quite full, with the melody shifting across voice parts as other voices serve as "instrumental" accompaniment. Brief moments of textual unison occur in homophony, particularly near the ends of phrases.

This work is suitable for intermediate and advanced choruses, and poses balance challenges due to its unique treatment of voices within the choral texture. As with Brubeck's other Berry setting (commissioned by the same ensemble), much of the writing for piano doubles the writing in the voice parts, which can assist singers with entrances and difficult melodic passages.

⁹² Brubeck, "Program Notes" in *The Wheel*.

Poem: For the Future

Printed in: *A Part*

Published: 1980

For the Future

Planting trees early in spring,
we make a place for birds to sing
in time to come. How do we know?
They are singing here now.
There is no other guarantee
that singing will ever be.⁹³

⁹³ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 252. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: For the Future

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

Poem: For the Future

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Fiddle, cello

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - A5

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: B2 - A4

Bass: D2 - E4

Meter: 2/4, 3/4, 5/4

Key Signature: E Major, G Major, A Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:20'

Character Words: Hearty, appalachian, marching

Publisher: Walton Music / WJMS1167

Published: 2018

Notes:

Andrew Maxfield's "For the Future" is a rousing and reflective setting of this short Wendell Berry poem. The writing for chorus is constructed out of a hearty pentatonic melody, first presented in the basses and then again in tutti unison, accompanied by foot-stomps to create a marching sound. The choral texture expands as the melody progresses, and sustained hums in the tenors and basses offer harmonic support. The melody becomes increasingly fragmented, and reaches a climactic peak with cascading repetitions of "how do we know?" sung in all voice parts. A brief instrumental interlude follows for fiddle and cello. The final sentence of Berry's text is performed in a slower, gentler texture that mirrors its pensive observation: "There is no other guarantee that singing will ever be." The choir repeats the last word and softens to repetitive hums, gradually softening and eventually fading to nothing.

This work is appropriately challenging for amateur choruses. The melodic building blocks of the piece are simple and can be learned quickly, but Maxfield's polyphony is not to be underestimated in its complexity. Vocal divisi is fairly common, and requires stability from the tenors and basses, who split into a four-part texture. There are also select moments of complicated voice leading for all vocal parts. The work also requires skilled instrumentalists, and preferably a violinist with fiddle-playing experience. Much of the violin part incorporates a "chopping" bow technique that acts as a percussive strike, borrowed from contemporary fiddle styles.

Choral Title: For the Future (a Round)From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: For the Future

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAAB

Forces: Hammered Dulcimer, percussion

Ranges:

SA: G3 - D5

B: D3 - A3

Meter: 15/8

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 2:30'

Character Words: Repeating, lilting

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's "For the Future (a Round)" sets the text of this short Berry poem in an inventive eight-bar round for treble voices. The 15/8 time signature can be felt in five with a 3+2 grouping, emphasized by the percussion. The melody is sung by treble voices in unison, then three times as a four-part round. The third and fourth repetitions include the addition of a separate Baritone part, which primarily adds harmonic support and creates the full five-part vocal texture.

The melody is lively and consists of variations of quarter and eighth note groupings. The unusual time signature and varied rhythms warrant slow and methodical teaching of the melody before introducing singers to the round. The instrumental writing includes a notated part for Hammered Dulcimer, but also includes chord changes for the possibility of substituting other instruments instead. The musical progression is quite simple and follows a repeating I-IV-V progression. The percussion involves shaker, frame drum, and maraca, and is designed so that it may be played by one person if desired.

Poem: I

from *Sabbaths*, 1984

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

I

Over the river in loud flood,
in the wind deep and broad
under the unending sky, pair
by pair, the swallows again,
with tender exactitude,
play out their line
in arcs laid on the air,
as soon as made, not there.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 63. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Swallows in Air
 From: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano I: E4 - G#5

Soprano II: C#4 - C#5

Alto I: B3 - B4

Alto II: F#3 - F#4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: C# Minor

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 1:10'

Character Words: Nimble, sparkling, suspenseful

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

Scored for treble chorus and piano, “Swallows in Air” is John Newell’s shortest setting from *A Timbered Choir*. The choir sings for only 17 measures, and the work ends expectantly on a dominant chord; conductors would be wise to pair this setting with a work to follow it attacca, either from Newell’s set or another work in a related key.

The choral texture is entirely homophonic, characterized by close harmonies in C# minor. A sparkling piano accompaniment floats above the chorus in rising and falling triplets as the left hand repeatedly sustains the dominant G# in low octaves. There are three brief chords which require a five-part split from the chorus, but otherwise the four-part texture is consistent for the entire work. The work may be an appropriate challenge for high school treble choruses and above, and should be considered for pairing with another work.

Choral Title: Over the River
 From: *Hymnody of Earth*
Poem: I

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAAB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano I: A3 - E5 (sop solo: E4 - G5)

Soprano II: A3 - E5

Alto I: A3 - C#5

Alto II: G3 - A4

Baritone: D3 - F#4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 1:15'

Character Words: Nimble, swift, delicate

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's "Over the River" is an intricate and deceptively challenging short work for SSAAB chorus. The work begins with a soprano solo, which Dalglish instructs "should be shouted, creating the image of a vast river valley." The vocal writing contains many grace note pickups and portamentos between notes, giving the music a free and folk-like character. However, rhythms are complex and there are frequent shifts in time signature, requiring rhythmic precision from the vocalists. Dalglish settles into a dance-like 6/8 section of polyphony as the chorus portrays the swallows moving "pair by pair." He writes that the light swiftness of the passage "should unfold into an airy harmonic wash that shifts quietly beneath the return of the solo."⁹⁵ The soloist's return repeats the poem in its entirety, with the choir supporting on sustained vowels, switching to text in close harmonies for the final two lines of text - Dalglish refers to this concluding solo as a "sighting of bird flight," replacing nimble polyphony with spacious sustained harmonies.

This work is moderately challenging for its complicated rhythms, fast tempo, and independence of voice parts. Advanced choirs may make quick work of this piece after accomplishing the opening sections of mixed meter, but this short work may require much rehearsal time for intermediate choirs to successfully accomplish. As with many of Dalglish's a cappella settings within *Hymnody of Earth*, it may be better fitting for a small chamber group.

⁹⁵ Dalglish, *Hymnody of Earth*, 18.

Poem: VII
 From *Sabbaths*, 1982

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*
 Published: 1998

VII

The clearing rests in song and shade.
 It is a creature made
 By old light held in soil and leaf,
 By human joy and grief,
 By human work,
 Fidelity of sight and stroke,
 By rain, by water on
 The parent stone.

We join our work to Heaven's gift,
 Our hope to what is left,
 That field and woods at last agree
 In an economy
 Of widest worth.
 High Heaven's Kingdom come on earth.
 Imagine Paradise.
 O dust, arise!⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 49. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Clearing Rests

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: VII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: G3 - Bb4

Tenor: E3 - G4

Bass: F2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Gentle, looping, ponderous

Publisher: Yalecrest Music / YCR0015

Published: 2013

Notes:

In the process of composing this work, composer Andrew Maxfield took inspiration from the phrase “A Continuous Harmony,” the title Berry gave to a collection of his essays. Maxfield explains how the concept of continuous harmony applies to this setting: “I repeat phrases to create a looping, gentle, meditative mood,”⁹⁷ In this gentle and ponderous work for chorus, Maxfield’s melodic writing is simple and beautiful. The work begins with a melody sung by the Altos, which has a song-like simplicity reminiscent of American folk songs. The Altos are soon joined in harmony by the Tenors and Sopranos, and the texture expands - voice parts gain melodic independence from each other, and the music becomes increasingly polyphonic. As fragments repeat and build in momentum, moments of homophony become all the more striking and bring a sense of arrival to the structure. This pattern repeats multiple times throughout the work, and includes a short section in compound meter with a livelier dance-like tempo.

This work may prove to be deceptively challenging to many choirs. Maxfield’s melodic writing is simple, but the repetitive phrases he mentions are the most challenging aspect of the piece. Singers share phrases that are similar but slightly offset from one another, requiring strong independence from all voice parts. Outside of occasional octave doubling in the basses and a single split in the sopranos, the scoring remains in four-part harmony with no divisi.

⁹⁷ Andrew Maxfield, “The Clearing Rests,” Andrew Maxfield, Composer, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://andrewmaxfield.org/products/the-clearing-rests>.

Choral Title: The Clearing Rests In Song and ShadeFrom: *Among The Trees*

Composer: William Campbell

Poem: VII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - Eb5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: C3 - F4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: 3/4, 4/4

Key Signature: Bb Major, Db Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 4:05'

Character Words: Flowing, gentle

Publisher: Swirly Music / WCL-001

Published: 2014

Notes:

This work is a gentle and simplistic setting of Berry's text that is approachable for many choirs. Simple rhythms, unison melodies, and repetitive phrases will allow for this piece to be learned with expediency, but the work retains a character of maturity and reverence. Campbell remarks on the melodic writing: "The main musical theme features the leap of an open fifth, descriptive perhaps of a clearing—an opening in the woods—made by human work and sustained by the natural cycles of the earth."⁹⁸ This brief motive weaves throughout the duration of the work and is shared in all voices. The choir sings in unison, in homophony, or in simple pairs of voices. A key change from Bb to Db Major delineates the poem's two stanzas of text, but the musical setting of the second stanza closely copies that of the first. Campbell instructs that the piece is *flowing*, *tempo rubato*, which creates a legato texture that is present throughout the work.

⁹⁸ William Campbell, "Composer's Notes" in *Among The Trees*.

Poem: To Know the Dark

Printed in: *Farming: A Hand Book*

Published: 1970

To Know the Dark

To go into the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 121. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: To Know the Dark

Composer: J. David Moore

Poem: “To Know the Dark”

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi), Soprano solo
SSAA (no divisi), Soprano solo

Forces: A cappella

Ranges: SATB

SSAA

Soprano: A3 - D5

S1: C4 - F5

Alto: A3 - C5

S2: C4 - Eb5

Tenor: Bb2 - F4

A1: Ab3 - Eb5

Bass: F2 - A3

A2: Db3 - Db4

Meter:

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 2:45'

Character Words: Suspenseful, hushed

Publisher: Fresh Ayre Music / FAM-0112-01

Published: 2018

Notes:

J. David Moore's setting of this short text is shrouded in melodic and harmonic ambiguity, creating a suspenseful and captivating setting that wonderfully portrays Berry's text. The work begins with an unaccompanied solo for Soprano, which presents the text and melodic material in their entirety. Marked *Andante Rubato*, the melody is presented in small fragments separated by pauses, each fragment expanding in duration as the melody continues. This creates a “stop and go” character to the music that withholds any sense of a steady meter. The choir's first entrance follows this same fragmented expansion. The harmonic language is similarly ambiguous. Moore does not provide a key signature, but the piece centers around D minor, often playing between D minor and Bb major, and ending on a repeated A Major chord, effectively acting as a half cadence.

The work's difficulty exists primarily in its technical challenges - rhythms are complex and fermatas are frequent, so there is some demand in the starting and stopping of the ensemble. Cross-voicing also occurs between neighboring voices, and in several instances close dissonances remain unresolved. The work's peak comes as the chorus sings “and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,” delivered first homophonically and then in canon from the treble voices; a moment of beauty and metric stability in an otherwise unsettled choral texture.

Choral Title: To Know the Dark

Composer: Joan Szymko

Poem: “To Know the Dark”

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA (minimal divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano I: E4 - A5

Soprano II: C4 - D5

Alto I: G3 - Db4

Alto II: A3 - E4

Meter: Mixed, compound

Key Signature: C Major, Db Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 2:20’

Character Words: Flowing, wandering, blooming

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 754

Published: 2007

Notes:

Joan Szymko’s “To Know the Dark” is a short work for treble chorus that beautifully captures the wandering and blooming imagery present within Berry’s poem. Much of the vocal writing consists of ascending major seconds, hummed by the singers. These ascending intervals are performed in imitation and create a backdrop of sustained harmonies, from which the melody emerges. Before the melody is introduced, a soloist speaks the text in its entirety as the sopranos hum. Szymko plays with harmonies that avoid half steps, utilizing the mixolydian mode (omitting the 3rd scale degree) and the pentatonic scale. The texture is almost entirely polyphonic, consisting of sustained hums and a melody sung by the Alto I’s (and later the Soprano I’s). The piano writing mirrors that of the voices, and primarily provides harmony through ascending sustained chords. The resulting musical character is flowing and wandering. The work’s musical peak comes in a brief moment of homophony, sung a cappella as the choir expands in harmony on the text “And find that the dark, too blooms and sings.”

This short work is filled with colorful harmonies and beautiful melodic writing. It may serve as a fitting challenge to advanced high school choirs and above. Its biggest challenge is created by a constantly shifting meter and the lack of text: various hummed entrances must appear fluid but require precise counting from singers. The texture also expands to eight-part harmony briefly at the work’s peak.

Poem: To the Holy Spirit

Printed in: *A Part*

Published: 1980

To the Holy Spirit

O Thou, far off and here, whole and broken,
Who in necessity and in bounty wait,
Whose truth is light and dark, mute though spoken.
By Thy wide grace show me Thy narrow gate.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 242. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: To the Holy Spirit

Composer: Joan Szymko

Poem: To the Holy Spirit

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - B5

Alto: B3 - C#5

Tenor: Eb3 - A4

Bass: A2 - C#4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Eb Maj, D Maj, C# min,
F# Maj

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:40'

Character Words: Evolving, fragmented, graceful

Publisher: Santa Barbara MP / SBMP 838

Published: 2008

Notes:

Wendell Berry's short poem "To The Holy Spirit" is filled with juxtaposing images that the narrator uses to illustrate the breadth of the Holy Spirit. Joan Szymko's setting for chorus and piano similarly illustrates principles of contrast and cohesion in a manner that is musically both unpredictable and graceful. The first five lines of the poem are presented simply at first by the Basses and Tenors, but quickly gain complexity and rhythmic momentum in their setting with unexpected shifts in meter and key signature. Szymko also repeats various phrases of text several times. The most frequently repeated text is "O Thou," sung a total of thirteen times across voices, offering a cohesive thread as the presentation of text becomes increasingly fragmented. The final two lines of text are also repeated, but Szymko gives them new focus by setting them homophonically and a cappella. At the work's close, the final repetition brings about an entirely new tonal center, concluding in B Major.

This work is challenging for its frequent shifts in key signature and tonal center, and will require diligent preparation for its abrupt shifts. Changes in tempo are subtle but significant, gradually increasing to the very center of the piece, where the text is most fragmented, and then slowly returning to Tempo I.

Choral Title: To the Holy Spirit
 From *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: To the Holy Spirit

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: A3 - D5

Alto: A3 - A4

Tenor: F#3 - E4

Bass: D3 - A3

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2:10'

Character Words: Spacious, hymn-like

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

“To the Holy Spirit” is a thirteen-measure chorale that beautifully sets this short Berry text. The text is sung twice: first as an unaccompanied soprano solo, and the second in tutti harmony. Phrases are short with pauses interspersed, and the meter changes nearly every measure, resulting in a rhythm that sounds unhurried and speech-like.

Simple harmonies and a narrow vocal range make this piece accessible for nearly all choirs. The constant shifts in time signature create some rhythmic challenges, but clarity from the conductor will allow choirs to navigate the shifts with ease. The work is quite short on its own, and comes from Dalglish’s larger song cycle *Hymnody of Earth*. Conductors may consider pairing it with the preceding Berry setting in the song cycle entitled “For the Future (a Round),” which is in the same key and is also short in length.

Poem: I

from *Sabbaths*, 1981

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

I

Here where the world is being made,
No human hand required,
A man may come, somewhat afraid
Always, and somewhat tired,

For he comes ignorant and alone
From work and worry of
A human place, in soul and bone
The ache of human love.

He may come and be still, not go
Toward any chosen aim
Or stay for what he thinks is so.
Setting aside his claim

On all things fallen in his plight,
his mind may move with leaves,
Wind-shaken, in and out of light,
And live as the light lives,

And live as the Creation sings
in covert, two clear notes,
And waits; then two clear answerings
Come from more distant throats—

May live a while with light, shaking
In high leaves, or delayed
In halts of song, submit to making,
The shape of what is made.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 35. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Here where the world is being made Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: I

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - F5 (solo: G5)

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: B2 - G4

Bass: F#2 - B3

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: B Minor, Bb Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 6:00'

Character Words: Sectional, wandering

Publisher: Yalecrest Music / YCR001

Published: 2013

Notes:

Andrew Maxfield's "Here where the world is being made" is a complex and evolving six-minute work for SATB divisi chorus. Marked *Adagio*, Maxfield's writing sets the six stanzas of Berry's text spaciously, and explores various tonal centers and choral textures. As with some of Maxfield's other settings within *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*, the work requires supported singing and diligent intonation due to its long sustained tones and close harmonies. The tenors and basses commonly sing on neutral syllables for extended passages as the treble voices sing the melody. The vocal texture is quite dense, particularly in the tenors and basses, who largely sing four-part harmonies containing cluster harmonies and dissonant intervals in a low vocal register. The harmonic language is fairly complex and incorporates modal mixture and brief tonicizations of various keys, but Maxfield keeps B as an anchoring tonal center, to which the work continually returns. The piece also calls briefly for SA soloists, who sing a distant duet on neutral syllables, portraying the "two clear notes" and "two clear answerings" Berry describes.

This work is suitable for advanced college choirs, and is demanding particularly for its dense vocal texture and abrupt shifts in harmony. The writing requires a strong bass section in particular, as several sections contain sustained low harmonies upon which the rest of the choir must balance its intonation.

Poem: II

from *Sabbaths*, 1985

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

II

A gracious Sabbath stood here while they stood
 Who gave our rest a haven.
 Now fallen, they are given
 To labor and distress.
 These times we know much evil, little good
 To steady us in faith
 And comfort when our losses press
 Hard on us, and we choose,
 In panic or despair or both,
 To keep what we will lose.

For we are fallen like the trees, our peace
 Broken, and so we must
 Love where we cannot trust,
 Trust where we cannot know,
 And must await the wayward-coming grace
 That joins living and dead,
 Taking us where we would not go—
 Into the boundless dark.
 When what was made has been unmade
 The Maker comes to His work.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 74. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: II

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella / optional string quartet

Ranges:

Soprano: Db4 - Bb5

Alto: B3 - Eb4

Tenor: D3 - G4

Bass: F2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 4:00'

Character Words: Song-like, contrasting, hopeful

Publisher: Yalecrest Music / YCR006

Published: 2013

Notes:

“A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here” was Andrew Maxfield’s first choral setting of Wendell Berry’s poetry. The composer praises the poem as “Berry at his finest,” and credits the poem as having sparked his other settings in the collection *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*.¹⁰³ This work is an evolving portrayal of Berry’s text that presents simple folk-like melodies in a deceptively difficult choral texture. Maxfield’s writing closely mirrors the imagery in the poem, which contrasts the human realities of daily life (“these times we know much evil, little good”) with aspirational thinking (“so we must Love where we cannot trust, Trust where we cannot know”). No key signature is provided, and individual voice parts contain difficult melodic leaps and occasional chromatic writing. But the tonal freedom affords Maxfield the chance to harmonically highlight the contrasts in the text - at times dissonant and jagged, at times lush and resolved.

This work was composed initially for unaccompanied SATB chorus, but features an optional string quartet. The string quartet is complementary to the chorus and could provide singers with a grounding support for difficult harmonic transitions. An excellent recording featuring the string quartet can be found in the Tantara Records Album “Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music,” performed by the Salt Lake Vocal Artists (Brady Allred, conductor), which features the majority of Maxfield’s choral settings that are listed in this study.

¹⁰³ Andrew Maxfield, “A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here,” Andrew Maxfield, Composer, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://andrewmaxfield.org/products/a-gracious-sabbath-stood-here>.

Poem: II

From *Sabbaths*, 1997

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

II (excerpt)

Every place had been displaced, every love
unloved, every vow unsworn, every work unmeant
to make way for the passage of the crowd
of the individuated, the autonomous, the self-actuated,
the homeless
with their many eyes opened only toward the objective
which they did not yet perceive in the far distance,
having never known where they were going,
having never known where they came from.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 208. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: A Timbered ChoirFrom: *A New Eaarth*

Composer: Robert Paterson

Poem: II

Text Usage: Excerpted

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5

Alto: Bb3 - Bb4

Tenor: Db3 - Ab4

Bass: Gb2 - C4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: F Minor, Bb Minor

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:55'

Character Words: Grand, biting, dirge

Publisher: Bill Holab Music

Published: 2012

Notes:

Robert Paterson composed *A New Eaarth* as a work for chorus, orchestra, and narrator. Paterson was inspired by Bill McKibben's book *Eaarth*, which asserts that climate change is not only inevitable but already present within our world (which he calls "Eaarth" - still recognizable, but markedly changed). Paterson's work is 38 minutes in length, and features the poetry (sung by the chorus) of Percy Bysshe Shelley, James Joyce, Wendell Berry, and William Wordsworth, along with various one-sentence proverbs and quotations from historical figures. All of the texts allude to the ancient classical elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Paterson includes his own texts as well (spoken by the narrator) which emphasize the urgency with which humans must address the issues of climate change. In addition to the full work, Paterson has also packaged the four movements for chorus into a fourteen minute Choral Suite scored for chorus and piano.

"A Timbered Choir" takes its text from one of Berry's 1997 *Sabbath* poems - a particularly lengthy and jarring poem which portrays a sort of waking nightmare, witnessing the destruction of culture and agriculture at the hands of capitalist endeavors (simply referred to as "the objective"). Paterson's setting is syllabic, homophonic, and biting, underscored by a march-like piano accompaniment that trudges on as the choir delivers this poignant text. Divisi splits are common and there are many cluster dissonances, but motivic material is simple and powerful, and could be accomplishable for many high school and collegiate choirs.

Poem: VI

From *Sabbaths*, 1987

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

VI

Remembering that it happened once,
 We cannot turn away the thought,
 As we go out, cold, to our barns
 Toward the long night's end, that we
 Ourselves are living in the world
 It happened in when it first happened,
 That we ourselves, opening a stall
 (A latch thrown open countless times
 Before), might find them breathing there,
 Foreknown: the Child bedded in straw,
 The mother kneeling over Him
 The husband standing in belief
 He scarcely can believe, in light
 That lights them from no source we see,
 An April morning's light, the air
 Around them joyful as a choir.
 We stand with one hand on the door,
 Looking into another world
 That is this world, the pale daylight
 Coming just as before, our chores
 To do, the cattle all awake,
 Our own white frozen breath hanging
 In front of us; and we are here
 As we have never been before,
 Sighted as not before, our place
 Holy, although we knew it not.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 94. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Remembering That It Happened Once Composer: J. David Moore

Poem: VI

Text Usage: Excerpted

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C#4 - F#5

Alto: G#3 - C#5

Tenor: C#3 - F4

Bass: F#2 - Db4

Meter: Mixed, simple / unmeasured

Key Signature: F# Minor, Db Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 4:55'

Character Words: Chant, spacious, meditative

Publisher: Fresh Ayre Music

Published: 2018

Notes:

J. David Moore's "Remembering That It Happened Once" is a pensive, soloistic, and challenging work for SATB chorus. The work is a fitting piece for winter holiday concerts, as Berry's poem paints the scene of Christ's birth. The text juxtaposes the simple tasks of daily life with the mystical setting of the manger, and ponders how we might react if we encountered Christ's birth for ourselves. Moore's setting is ponderous itself - it contains several unmeasured sections of chant for a treble or bass soloist, with phrases delineated by spacious pauses. When the chorus joins, phrases are short and frequently change time signature. Though Moore's rhythms are specific, they vary greatly and are set syllabically. As such, the piece moves from phrase to phrase with melodic lines that sound free and unmeasured. Moore's harmonic writing begins simply but grows in complexity and ultimately concludes in tonal ambiguity. The voice leading for singers is fairly challenging and includes large melodic leaps to non chord tones.

Moore's work is a worthy challenge for singers, and is appropriate for university choirs and above. Chamber choirs may be particularly appropriate for accomplishing the intricate rhythmic ensemble challenges that the piece poses. Vocal divisi is frequent, and singers must sustain long tones in several passages. A reverberant recital hall would further aid the effectiveness of this piece, particularly its chant-inspired rhythmic freedom and pauses between phrases.

Poem: III

from *Sabbaths*, 1994

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

III

(Ye must be born again.)

I think of Gloucester, blind, led through the world
 To the world's edge by the hand of a stranger
 Who is his faithful son. At the cliff's verge
 He flings away his life, as of no worth,
 The true way lost, his eyes two bleeding wounds—
 And finds his life again, and is led on
 By the forsaken son who has become
 His father, that the good may recognize
 Each other, and at last go ripe to death.
 We live the given life, and not the planned.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 178. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: I think of Gloucester, blind

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: III

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: BB Chorus, B solo

Forces: Cello

Ranges:

Bass-Baritone chorus : Eb2 - C4

B Soloist: G2 - Eb4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Bb Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 3:20'

Character Words: Heavy, soloistic, hopeful

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2009

Notes:

Andrew Maxfield composed “I think of Gloucester, blind” as a prelude to “The Little Stream Sings,” another Berry choral setting scored for SATB chorus. He explains: “The idea is that this piece expresses the need for rebirth which is then fulfilled in the second piece.”¹⁰⁷ As such, this short work for Bass-Baritone chorus and Bass soloist may hardly be considered a standalone work for chorus. It largely features the soloist, who presents the majority of text. The choir sustains long tones on a hum, singing unison passages occasionally and breaking to a two-part split in only one passage. The vocal parts are paired with a solo cello, which imitates and expands the melodic content presented by the soloist.

Berry’s poetry alludes to the narrative of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, in which the Earl of Gloucester is prepared to throw himself off a cliff. Andrew Maxfield shares his interpretation: “What he doesn’t realize is that he is about to encounter a rebirth of sorts. And despite the incredibly tense language and imagery, I hear it in a bright ray of hope, which may explain the several allusions to the hymn ‘Christ the Lord is Risen Today’ that appear throughout.”

While this work is simplistic for Bass-Baritone chorus, it requires a skilled soloist, capable of long unaccompanied passages and sustained high notes. Similarly it requires a skilled cello player: the writing includes double stops, harmonics, and solo passages which may be performed without the conductor.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Maxfield, “I Think of Gloucester, Blind,” Andrew Maxfield, Composer, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://andrewmaxfield.org/products/i-think-of-gloucester-blind>.

Poem: III

From: *Sabbaths*, 1979

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

III

To sit and look at light-filled leaves
 May let us see, or seem to see,
 Far backward as through clearer eyes
 To what unsighted hope believes:
 The blessed conviviality
 That sang Creation's seventh sunrise,

Time when the Maker's radiant sight
 Made radiant every thing He saw,
 And every thing He saw was filled
 With perfect joy and life and light.
 His perfect pleasure was sole law;
 No pleasure had become self-willed.

For all His creatures were His pleasures
 And their whole pleasure was to be
 What He made them; they sought no gain
 Or growth beyond their proper measures,
 Nor longed for change or novelty.
 The only new thing could be pain.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 8. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: To Sit and Look at Light-Filled Leaves Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From *Celebrating Wendell Berry and Music*

Poem: III

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C#4 - F#5

Alto: G3 - C#5

Tenor: C#3 - F#4

Baritone: F#2 - Db4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: F Major, Db Major, D Major,
G Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 4:05'

Character Words: Joyous, chromatic, changing

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2013

Notes:

This setting of Berry's poetry is filled with technical challenges, but presents a character that is joyous and ever-changing. Composer Andrew Maxfield offers insight into his choral setting, remarking that Berry's poem "invites us to consider the ignorant bliss of Eden right down until the last line: 'the only new thing could be pain.' ...And so this setting dwells in a too-tidy Eden until it, too, arrives at that profound, painful realization."¹⁰⁹ Maxfield's "too-tidy Eden" is portrayed in choral writing that is intricate, filled with chromatic writing, shifting tonal centers, contrapuntal passages, and frequent changes in texture. Throughout this writing, the music retains a character of levity and jubilation, mirroring the descriptive words within Berry's text (radiant, jubilant, perfect, pleasure). However, the momentum ominously slows in the work's final measures, accompanied by chromatically descending voices, reaching the "profound, painful realization" that Maxfield describes.

Though conservative in its vocal registers, this work is quite challenging for its chromatic voice leading and advanced contrapuntal textures. Much work must be done to perform these technical demands in a style that retains the jubilant character of the music. Maxfield's changes in texture and key signature create natural "seams" which may cater to conductors as points of arrival to be used in the rehearsal process.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Maxfield, "To Sit and Look at Light-Filled Leaves," Andrew Maxfield, Composer, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://andrewmaxfield.org/products/to-sit-and-look-at-light-filled-leaves>.

Poem: IV

from *Sabbaths*, 1993

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

IV

Hate has no world.
The people of hate must try
to possess the world of love,
for it is the only world;
it is Heaven and Earth.
But as lonely, eager hate
possesses it, it disappears;
it never did exist,
and hate must seek another
world that love has made.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 170. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Hate Has No World

Composer: Bradley Ellingboe

Poem: IV

Text Usage: Full, one sentence modified

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: Piano, body percussion

Ranges:

Soprano: F#4 - F#5

Alto: B3 - D5

Tenor: D3 - E4

Bass: A2 - C4

Meter: 3/4, 7/8

Key Signature: D Minor, D Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:50'

Character Words: Percussive, contrasting, hopeful

Publisher: National Music Publishers / NM1078 Published: 2023

Notes:

Bradley Ellingboe composed “Hate Has No World” for the Pro Musica International Choral Festival, commissioned by Albany Pro Musica. The work’s Virtual World Premiere was in 2021, and its first live premiere took place at the festival in July 2023. The setting is powerful and rhythmic, and utilizes body percussion and spoken text from the chorus. Berry’s text describes a conflict between “the people of hate” and “the world of love” which they try to possess. Ellingboe paints this contrast musically, as the key switches back and forth between D Minor and D Major. The work has contrasting tempi and time signatures as well, alternating between sections of fast and accented rhythms in 7/8 and sections of slow hymn-like writing in 3/4. Rhythmic patterns are simple and repetitive, and the texture alternates between unison singing and homophony. The body percussion accompanies the sections in 7/8, and singers are instructed to pat their sternum or thigh, accenting the subdivided groupings of the time signature (3+2+2). Conductors should note that Ellingboe changes one word of text, arguably changing the message. In the sentence “The people of hate must try to possess the world of love,” the choir’s second repetition replaces the word “hate” with “love.”

This energetic and contrasting work is suitable for most SATB choruses, and may be a fitting work for honor and festival choirs. Ellingboe’s vocal writing is simple and repetitive, and vocal registers are small. The incorporation of body percussion and spoken text may add interesting variety to a concert program.

Poem: IV

from *Sabbaths*, 1980

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

IV

The frog with lichenized back and golden thigh
Sits still, almost invisible
On leafed and lichenized stem,
Invisibility
Its sign of being at home
There in its given place, and well.

The warbler with its quivering striped throat
Would live almost beyond my sight,
Almost beyond belief,
But for its double note —
Among high leaves a leaf,
At ease, at home in air and light.

And I, through woods and fields, through fallen days,
Am passing to where I belong:
At home, at ease, and well,
In Sabbaths of this place
Almost invisible,
Toward which I go from song to song.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 28. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Frog With Lichened Back

Composer: John Newell

From: *A Timbered Choir*

Poem: IV

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: Solo or Unison

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - F5

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Ab Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 2:45'

Character Words: Steady, sustained, placid

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

John Newell composed “The Frog With Lichened Back” for soprano solo within his larger work *A Timbered Choir*. It is in this study because he indicates that the work can also be sung by unison voices. The work is peaceful and steady, with constant flowing eighth notes in the piano that move in parallel over sustained low notes. Newell uses a harmonic language that is much gentler than in some of his other Berry settings, and centers the most regularly around the notes in the C minor pentatonic scale. Like the eighth notes of the piano, the vocal writing similarly ebbs and flows in its lyricism - there is no notable change in character throughout the short work, nor is there distinct sectionality. Rather, the entire work is gentle and meditative. The work would be a moderate challenge for unison treble voices because of its occasionally challenging voice leading and frequent changes in meter (though the eighth note pulse remains constant). If programmed for treble voices, this setting could offer excellent harmonic variety to a concert.

Poem: IV

from *Sabbaths*, 1994

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

IV

They sit together on the porch, the dark
 Almost fallen, the house behind them dark.
 Their supper done with, they have washed and dried
 The dishes—only two plates now, two glasses,
 Two knives, two forks, two spoons—small work for two.
 She sits with her hands folded in her lap,
 At rest. He smokes his pipe. They do not speak.
 And when they speak at last it is to say
 What each one knows the other knows. They have
 One mind between them, now, that finally
 For all its knowing will not exactly know
 Which one goes first through the dark doorway, bidding
 Goodnight, and which sits on a while alone.¹¹²

¹¹² Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 179. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Together on the Porch
From: *At Home*

Composer: Timothy C. Takach

Poem: IV

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: 2-Part

Forces: Flute, Clarinet

Ranges:

Part I: B3 - G5

Part II: F#3 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: G Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 4:15'

Character Words: Gentle, spacious, nostalgic

Publisher: Timothy C. Takach Publications

Published: 2019

Notes:

“Together on the Porch” is the final movement of Timothy C. Takach’s larger work for chorus *At Home*. Takach selected poems of Wendell Berry that were relevant to the work’s commission - the celebration of a spouse’s 70th birthday. He chooses this Berry poem to conclude the work, a text which depicts a couple in old age sitting at rest, content in their shared silence on the porch. The musical setting is gentle and beautiful. A flute and clarinet deliver most of the melodic content, and play for the duration of the piece. The writing for the woodwinds is gentle and nostalgic, set in harmonies reminiscent of the pastoral American soundscapes of Aaron Copland. The vocal writing is set in two-part and may be performed as a duet or by SATB chorus. The writing is homophonic and never rushed; pauses in the text are common as the woodwinds play on, giving the poem’s words time to settle. Takach beautifully portrays the stillness and calm that the text describes.

Though the vocal writing is simple, this work’s unhurried nature and peaceful character warrant musical maturity from performing ensembles. The writing for woodwinds requires skilled players, and functions like a duet for the entire piece. There is one instance of four-part vocal harmony, but otherwise the texture remains two-part throughout.

Poem: IV

From: *Sabbaths*, 1982

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

IV

Thrush song, stream song, holy love
That flows through earthly forms and folds,
The song of Heaven's Sabbath fleshed
In throat and ear, in stream and stone,
A grace living here as we live,
Move my mind now to that which holds
Things as they change.

The warmth has come.
The doors have opened. Flower and song
Embroider ground and air, lead me
Beside the healing field that waits;
Growth, death, and a restoring form
Of human use will make it well.
But I go on, beyond, higher
In the hill's fold, forget the time
I come from and go to, recall
This grove left out of all account,
A place enclosed in song.

Design

Now falls from through. I go amazed
Into the maze of a design
That mind can follow but not know,
Apparent, plain, and yet unknown,
The outline lost in earth and sky.
What form wakens and rumples this?
Be still. A man who seems to be
A gardener rises out of the ground,
Stands like a tree, shakes off the dark,
The bluebells opening at his feet,
The light one figured cloth of song.¹¹³

¹¹³ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 43. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Thrush Song
From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: IV

Text Usage: Excerpted

Voicing: SSAAB

Forces: Hammered Dulcimer, Bodhran

Ranges:

Soprano I: G#3 - E5

Soprano II: G#3 - E5

Alto I: G#3 - E5

Alto II: G#3 - E5

Baritone: E3 - C#4

Meter: 6/8, 3/8

Key Signature: A Minor

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 5:05'

Character Words: Canonic, flowing,

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's "Thrush Song" presents Berry's words in simple and focused clarity before allowing the choral texture to bloom in imitation. This moderately complex work for chorus is set in a swaying 6/8 and utilizes modal mixture, melodic leaps, and canonic writing to create a musical setting appropriate for the richness of Berry's words. The work primarily consists of two canons, neither of them strict. The first melody is presented in 4-6 voices, then in canon with all treble voices. The next canon is shorter, only four measures, and incorporates the Baritones, splitting into a dense five-part polyphonic texture before realigning into homophony. The harmonic writing is intriguing and plays with modal mixture frequently, switching back and forth between A Minor and A Major. Notably, this work only excerpts half of the Berry poem from which it takes its text - the text is used from first and third stanzas.

This work is fitting for intermediate and advanced ensembles, and is challenging due to its demands in register and in its various deviations from the established canons. The vocal range of the first canon is quite large. All treble voices have the same register requirements in this score, and conductors may consider re-voicing their treble singers as needed for balance. The composer also notes that "this piece can be powerful even without percussion, and the arpeggiated dulcimer part translates well to the piano."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Dalglish, *Hymnody of Earth*, 56.

Poem: V

From: *Sabbaths*, 1985

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

V

How long does it take to make the woods?
 As long as it takes to make the world.
 The woods is present as the world is, the presence
 of all its past, and of all its time to come.
 It is always finished, it is always being made, the act
 of its making forever greater than the act of its destruction.
 It is a part of eternity, for its end and beginning
 belong to the end and beginning of all things,
 the beginning lost in the end, the end in the beginning.

What is the way to the woods, how do you go there?
 By climbing up through the six days' field,
 kept in all the body's years, the body's
 sorrow, weariness, and joy. By passing through
 the narrow gate on the far side of that field
 where the pasture grass of the body's life gives way
 to the high, original standing of the trees.
 By coming into the shadow, the shadow
 of the grace of the straight way's ending,
 the shadow of the mercy of light.

Why must the gate be narrow?
 Because you cannot pass beyond it burdened.
 To come in among these trees you must leave behind
 the six days' world, all of it, all of its plans and hopes.
 You must come without weapon or tool, alone,
 expecting nothing, remembering nothing,
 into the ease of sight, the brotherhood of eye and leaf.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 77. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Way to the Woods

Composer: Olli Kortekangas

Poem: V

Text Usage: Full, two sentences modified

Voicing: SATB, much divisi

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - A5

Alto: G#3 - E5

Tenor: B2 - A#4

Bass: C2 - E4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Professional

Duration: 7:35'

Character Words: Complex, jarring, bold

Publisher: Fennica Gehrman

Published: 2008

Notes:

Finnish composer Olli Kortekangas wrote “The Way to the Woods” as part of a commission from the Syracuse Vocal Ensemble in 2008. He later went on to compose *Seven Songs for Planet Earth*, a symphonic cantata which also incorporates Berry’s poetry. This eight-minute work for a cappella chorus is exceedingly difficult for its vocal demands and advanced compositional techniques, and is best suited for advanced and professional choirs. The work is through-composed and grows in complexity throughout the piece. Kortekangas employs pentatonic and whole tone scales in much of his writing, and colors his harmonies with polytonality (most commonly a jarring and sustained E triad containing both G and G#). The choral texture varies frequently, and includes challenging and technical passages which place triplet rhythms against straight eighth and sixteenth rhythms. Some sectionality is created through the use of soloists and changes tempo, but there are no notable harmonic or melodic motives which delineate sections - instead the motivic ideas thread together into an amalgamating whole which may strike listeners as more technical than musical or textually-driven.

This work is best suited for professional choirs, due to its technical demands for the vocalists. Currently no performance recording exists, nor does a digital perusal score. Though published by Fennica Gehrman, scores can be purchased through Hal Leonard and Boosey & Hawkes.

Poem: V

From: *Sabbaths*, 1991

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

V

The seed is in the ground.
Now may we rest in hope
While darkness does its work.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 131. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Seed Is in the Ground

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: V

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - G5

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: D3 - E4

Bass: F2 - D4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: G Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 5:20'

Character Words: Pensive, flowing, spacious

Publisher: Yalecrest Music / YCR007

Published: 2013

Notes:

“The Seed Is in the Ground” is a meditative and gorgeous setting of this short Berry poem. Maxfield beautifully portrays the notions of rest and hope present within the poem. This work is characterized by its unhurried melodies and spacious treatment of text. Much of the piece is sung on neutral syllables and hums, allowing the text to emerge in gentle and repeated phrases. The harmonic language is simple and primarily consists of rising and falling intervals over sustained bass notes, often creating suspensions, seventh chords, and occasional cluster harmonies. The text is presented in its entirety twice, with additional repetitions of the line “now may we rest in hope.” Rather than evolving or changing in character, the melodies and harmonies largely remain the same throughout the work, which creates a sense of rootedness and comfort.

This work is suitable for advanced high school choirs and above. Its primary challenges will involve intonation. All voice parts contain passages of long sustained tones, particularly the basses. Vocal divisi is also common throughout the work, especially so in the sopranos and altos. Because the work remains tonally rooted in G Major, directors may find success by utilizing tools like solfege for targeting intonation.

Poem: VI

From: *Sabbaths*, 1979

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

VI

What stood will stand, though all be fallen,
 The good return that time has stolen.
 Though creatures groan in misery,
 Their flesh prefigures liberty
 To end travail and bring to birth
 Their new perfection in new earth.
 At word of that enlivening
 Let the trees of the woods all sing
 And every field rejoice, let praise
 Rise up out of the ground like grass.
 What stood, whole in every piecemeal
 Thing that stood, will stand though all
 Fall—field and woods and all in them
 Rejoin the primal Sabbath's hymn.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 13. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: What Stood Will Stand

Composer: Paul Halley

Poem: VI

Text Usage: Full, additional Latin text added

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - A5 (soloist: B5)

Alto: F#3 - E5

Tenor: B2 - F#4

Bass: E2 - E4

Meter: 2/2, 3/2, 3/4

Key Signature: B Minor

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 5:30'

Character Words: Meditative, minimalist, intricate

Publisher: Back Alley Music

Published: 1986

Notes:

Composer Paul Halley served as Director of Music at the Cathedral of St. John The Divine in New York City from 1977 to 1989. Wendell Berry visited this cathedral occasionally, and in 1986 came to give a sermon at the Sunday service. Halley wrote "What Stood Will Stand" for this occasion, using one of Berry's *Sabbaths* poems as its text, also incorporating Alleluias and the final sentence of the Nicene Creed, which reads "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen." The work is both meditative and intricate, with passages of chant-like unison interspersed within textured moments of polyphony. Halley explores a minimalist texture in his polyphony, creating a fabric of small ostinatos in the tenors and sopranos, over which the altos and basses sing the melody. The harmonic language is simplistic throughout, largely centered around the notes of the B Minor pentatonic scale. The form is also repetitive: a choral refrain of "Alleluia" stands at the center of the piece and is repeated before the work's conclusion, and the ostinato passages in sopranos and tenors also reappear within the work.

This work is simplistic in its melodic content, repetitive form, and treatment of harmony. However, its complexity lies in its dense multi-voiced texture. The work is eagerly in eight-part divisi, and occasionally calls for three-part divisions in the altos and basses. Long sustained notes and repetitive ostinatos require diligent treatment of tuning. This work is likely best suited for larger choirs with experienced singers. Scores of this work can be purchased through Pelagos Music Publishing.

Poem: VII
 from *Sabbaths*, 1985

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*
 Published: 1998

VII

The winter wren is back, quick
 Among the treeroots by the stream,
 Feeding from stem to stone to stick,
 And in his late return the rhyme

Of years again completes itself.
 He makes his work a kind of play.
 He pauses on a little shelf
 Of rock, says "Tick!" and flirts away.

Too busy in that other world
 His hungry vision brings to sight
 To be afraid. He makes a gnarled
 Root graceful with his airy weight,

Breathes in the great informing Breath,
 Made little in his wing and eye,
 And breathes it out again in deft
 Bright links of sing, his clarity.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 79. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Winter Wren is BackFrom: *A Timbered Choir*

Composer: John Newell

Poem: VII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: Eb4 - G5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: E3 - G4

Bass: G2 - C4

Meter: Mixed, simple and compound

Key Signature: F Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 1:40'

Character Words: Fluttering, precise, articulated

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

John Newell's "The Winter Wren is Back" is a challenging work for chorus that playfully sets Wendell Berry's text. Berry's poem describes the actions of a winter wren that has returned to its habitat. Newell musically sets this text in a manner that conjures images of the bird's activities. Sporadic staccato notes in a high register of the piano are prevalent throughout the piece, along with grace notes and sextuplet sixteenth note groupings that conjure a fluttering image. The vocal writing is quite challenging, with melodic writing that mirrors the busy and unpredictable staccato character of the piano. As with other settings in Newell's *A Timbered Choir*, the piece is without a tonal center, and thus melodic writing is oftentimes complex. The work features voice parts individually before eventually reaching a fully homophonic texture, in which the choral rhythms become a bit more stable and the piano in turn becomes more active with increases in grace notes and trills.

This short work is a wonderful challenge for advanced choirs, and poses difficulties in counting and intonation. The work also requires a pianist of great ability, as the writing is very technical and features the piano heavily.

Poem: VII
from *Sabbaths*, 1997

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*
Published: 1998

VII

There is a day
when the road neither
comes nor goes, and the way
is not a way but a place.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 216. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: A Place
From: *At Home*

Composer: Timothy C. Takach

Poem: VII

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (canon)

Forces: Flute, Clarinet

Ranges:

SA: B3 - D5

TB: B2 - D4

Meter: 6/8

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2:15'

Character Words: Simple, lilting, staged

Publisher: Timothy C. Takach Publications

Published: 2019

Notes:

“A Place” is a delightful and surprisingly robust round for SATB chorus, flute, and clarinet. It is the fourth movement of composer Timothy C Takach’s larger work *At Home*. This short work follows a simple structure: all voices introduce the round’s melody in unison, accompanied by flute. The canon is then presented in four parts, accompanied by flute and clarinet. After the final voice part concludes, a four-bar passage is repeated and gradually fades. The woodwind players are instructed to begin walking to the back of the hall or off-stage, where they play the work’s final measures.

This work is accessible for choirs of all abilities, and could easily be taught by rote to inexperienced or non-reading singers. The writing for woodwinds highly compliments the texture of the canon, creating a polyphonic texture that is surprisingly full at its peak. It should be noted that the four part round does not assign voice parts, but the repeating four-measure passage is non-canonic and does contain independent writing for each voice part. Choir directors can take note of this when considering staging options for singers.

Poem: X

from *Sabbaths*, 1979

Printed in: *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*

Published: 1998

X

Whatever is foreseen in joy
Must be lived out from day to day.
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Berry, *A Timbered Choir*, 18. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Whatever is Foreseen in Joy Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: X

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB, moderate divisi

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - Ab5

Alto: Bb3 - Db5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: F2 - Db4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 3:30'

Character Words: Rugged, jubilant, rousing

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2013

Notes:

This rousing work for divisi SATB chorus is a jubilant setting of Wendell Berry's text, which reflects on the virtue of hard work. Maxfield utilizes a recurring dotted-eighth sixteenth motive on the word "joy," which weaves its way through every voice part and acts as a connective thread throughout the piece. Moments of brief homophony help to punctuate cadences and emphasize the tonal center of C Major. A brief contrasting section (marked "slower, grander") reflects the thematic shift Berry introduces in the poem's second stanza. Rather than continuing to praise the virtues of human work, the text poignantly reflects on the gifts of the earth: "great work is done while we're asleep." The choral texture becomes gentler, substituting imitative polyphony for slower rhythms and an increase in homophonic singing. The work concludes as it begins, with a return to its original tempo and a final expanding crescendo of the initial "joy" motive.

This work poses intonation challenges due to long phrases and the sustained vowel of "joy." Occasional unexpected leaps in the melodic writing also require stability from all voice parts. The piece could be appropriately challenging for advanced high school ensembles and above. Its rousing character and bold conclusion make it a fitting option for an opening or closing work on a choral program.

Poem: IX

From: *Sabbaths*, 2006

Printed in: *This day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New*

Published: 2013

VII

Before we kill another child
for righteousness' sake, to serve
some blissful killer's sacred cause,
some bloody patriot's anthem
and his flag, let us leave forever
our ancestral lands, our holy books,
our god thoughtified to the mean
of our smallest selves. Let us go
to the graveyard and lie down
forever among the speechless stones.¹²¹

¹²¹ Wendell Berry, *This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 294.
Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Absalom, Absalom

Composer: Philip Orem

Poem: VII

Text Usage: Combined with 2 Samuel 18:33

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano, speakers

Ranges:

Soprano: B3 - Bb5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: C#3 - G4

Bass: F2 - E4

Meter: 3/4, 4/4

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 8:50'

Character Words: Unrelenting, jarring, sorrowful

Publisher: Orem Music

Published: 2016

Notes:

Philip Orem's "Absalom, Absalom" is a jarring and powerful work, intended "to address the violence that has become endemic in our communities."¹²² The piece combines a poignant text of Wendell Berry with an excerpt of the commonly-set passage of biblical scripture 2 Samuel 18:33, colloquially referred to as "When David Heard." Berry's writing expresses outrage at the human willingness to disregard the lives of children in the face of war. His words are paired with David's lament, grieving the loss of his son and expressing "Would God I had died for thee!"

Orem's work is quite heavy in subject matter, and may disturb audience members for its incorporation of speakers. The composer instructs that prior to the performance, a list of names of children who have died as recent victims of violence should be collected, along with a list of names of the children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews of the audience members in attendance of the performance. Speakers are to be positioned around the performance venue. Within the performance, narrators will read the names from the first list, then switch to the names from the second list (those of attendee's family members). Orem also instructs that the reading of names grows in volume and speed as the piece continues. The choral writing is continually dissonant and unresolved. Orem frequently uses pairs of fourths that are separated by a half step, creating a sound that is both dissonant and hollow. For its maturity in content, this piece should be considered carefully when programming.

¹²² Philip Orem, "Performance Instructions" in *Absalom, Absalom* (Orem Music, 2016).

Poem: Woods

Printed in: *A Part*

Published: 1980

Woods

I part the out thrusting branches
and come in beneath
the blessed and the blessing trees.
Though I am silent
there is singing around me.
Though I am dark
there is vision around me.
Though I am heavy
there is flight around me.¹²³

¹²³ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 237. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Woods
From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: Woods

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSA

Forces: Hammered dulcimer, piano

Ranges:

Soprano I: A3 - E5

Soprano II: A3 - C5

Alto: F#3 - A4

Meter: 6/8

Key Signature: A Major, D Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4:00'

Character Words: Lilted, playful, bright

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 2004

Notes:

“Woods” is a delightful setting for treble chorus, piano, and hammered dulcimer by composer Malcolm Dalglish. Though published after the initial creation of his song cycle *Hymnody of Earth*, which incorporates many choral settings of Berry’s poetry, the composer still considers this piece to be a part of that larger collection. The work features bright cluster harmonies and is set in a lilted 6/8. The writing for hammered dulcimer is flashy and fast, playing a variety of arpeggiated sixteenth note patterns that permeate the work, while the piano primarily sustains harmonies in long tones, occasionally coloring phrases with bright additional harmonies in a high register. The choral writing is folk-like, characterized by syllabic rhythms and close harmonies. Berry’s text is presented in its entirety twice, the second time utilizing slightly more complex vocal writing than the first. Dalglish concludes with a dance-like section on neutral syllables which pass from voice to voice to illuminate Berry’s closing words: “there is flight around me.” The musical character is buoyant and bright.

This work was written for the Bel Canto Children’s Chorus, and could be accomplished by many treble choruses. It should be noted that the work arguably features hammered dulcimer more so than the chorus. As such, the writing for hammered dulcimer is integral to the score and requires a skilled player.

Poem: Stay Home

Printed in: *A Part*

Published: 1980

Stay Home

I will wait here in the fields
to see how well the rain
brings on the grass.
In the labor of the fields
longer than a man's life
I am at home. Don't come with me.
You stay home too.

I will be standing in the woods
where the old trees
move only with the wind
and then with gravity.
In the stillness of the trees
I am at home. Don't come with me.
You stay home too.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 229. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: I am at Home
From: *At Home*

Composer: Timothy C. Takach

Poem: Stay Home

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Flute, Clarinet

Ranges:

Soprano: E4 - E5

Alto: B3 - B4

Tenor: E3 - G#4

Bass: D2 - E4

Meter: 3/4, 4/4

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 3:15'

Character Words: Gentle, content, nostalgic

Publisher: Timothy C. Takach Publications

Published: 2019

Notes:

"I am at Home" is the first movement from Timothy C. Takach's larger work for chorus *At Home*. Takach selected poems of Wendell Berry that were relevant to the work's commission - the celebration of a spouse's 70th birthday. In the work's liner notes, Takach explains that he chose this poem for the first movement to establish two characters, sharing a space together - a thematic motive that returns in the final movement. He offers his interpretation of the poem's text: "Wendell Berry's poem doesn't immediately join these two people together, he instead asserts his own individuality of where he finds himself at home, and it's alone, out in nature. Yet he still cares for his partner in this poem, wishing for them to stay just as content in their own personal place of belonging."¹²⁵

Takach's setting for chorus is beautiful and can be performed by choirs of all abilities. The writing for chorus is homophonic and repetitive, and vocal ranges for trebles are within one octave. One two-measure phrase calls for a D2 from the basses, but Takach provides a split so that an A2 may be sung instead by basses who cannot reach it. The work's greatest accomplishment is its thoughtful writing for the woodwinds, which wrap the musical texture in a mature and inviting sound, despite the simplistic and often repeating phrases from the chorus. The instrumental parts carry much of the piece's melodic content, and require skilled players.

¹²⁵ Timothy C. Takach, "From the Composer" in *At Home*, comp. Timothy Takach (Timothy C. Takach Publications, 2019).

Poem: From the Crest

Printed in: *Clearing*

Published: 1977

From the Crest (excerpt)

8.

And when we speak together,
love, our words rise
like leaves, out of our fallen
words. What we have said
becomes an earth we live on
like two trees, whose sheddings
enrich each other, making
both the source of each.

When we love, the green
stalks and downturned bells
of lilies grow from our flesh.
Dreams and visions flower
From these beds our bodies are.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 220. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: And When We Speak Together, Love Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: From the Crest

Text Usage: Excerpted passage

Voicing: SATB, much divisi

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - A#5

Alto: Bb3 - Db5

Tenor: Bb2 - Gb4

Bass: F#2 - D#4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Bb Minor, B Major

Difficulty: Advanced

Duration: 5:45'

Character Words: Lush, intricate, jazz-inspired

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2013

Notes:

Andrew Maxfield's "And When We Speak Together, Love" is perhaps the most difficult choral work from his collection *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*. The work's text is excerpted from Berry's poem "From the Crest." This musical setting is lush and filled with thematic swells, finding its dramatic peak on the words "lilies grow from our flesh." A descending humming motive from the tenors and basses begins and ends the work, and wraps the music in an ethereal character befitting of Berry's love poem.

Maxfield's writing is intricate and quite challenging. Harmonies are rich and show the influence of jazz, particularly at the ends of phrases. The voice leading is often unpredictable and involves chromaticism and modal mixture. The vocal texture varies from homophonic to contrapuntal, and includes a passage that imitates a fugue. Other challenges include frequent shifts in meter, syncopated rhythms, and a demanding vocal register that includes sustained A#5 notes in the sopranos. Vocal divisi is common; much of the writing is for 8-part chorus. This work would be best suited for high-performing and professional choirs.

Poem: Epitaph

Printed in: *Entries*

Published: 1997

Epitaph

Having lived long in time,
he lives now in timelessness
without sorrow, made perfect
by our never finished love,
by our compassion and forgiveness,
and by his happiness in receiving
these gifts we give. Here in time
we are added to one another forever.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 342. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Epitaph
From *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: Epitaph

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA / SAAT

Forces: Hammered Dulcimer

Ranges:

Soprano I: Bb3 - C5

Soprano II: Bb3 - C5

Alto I: Bb3 - C5

Alto II: G3 - C5

Meter: 9/8, 12/8

Key Signature: F Major (C Mixolydian)

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 4:10'

Character Words: Scottish, spacious, free

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 1996

Notes:

Set to the Scottish lament “Lochaber No More,” Malcolm Dalglish’s “Epitaph” is a spacious and reflective setting of Wendell Berry’s poem of the same title, which he wrote in tribute to his father. Dalglish shares his thoughts on how the song might be used: “This is a good sign for drawing the audience together into the sound of universal ideas; timelessness and how collective memory can be a kind of life after death.”¹²⁸ His musical setting for treble chorus and hammered dulcimer is spacious, simple, and beautiful. The chorus sings the melody in unison for the majority of the piece, breaking into a four-part texture for sixteen bars sung on the syllable “dee.” The composer advises that singers adopt a reedy chest voice timbre similar to the bagpipe in this section. The melody is in a lilting compound meter, alternating between 9/8 and 12/8 and characterized by grace notes which fall on large beats. The accompaniment for hammered dulcimer is quite simple, and serves primarily to let the underlying chords ring out. Dalglish suggests organ, harmonium, or accordion as possible substitutes.

This delightful and moving work is accomplishable for many treble choruses. The passage of homophonic writing requires stable singing from Alto 2s, who sustain a G3 as a pedal note for several bars. Given the spaciousness of the song and the large amount of unison singing, Dalglish suggests that it may work well as a processional or recessional. A second voicing (SAAT) is also available for choruses, written a whole step lower than the original key.

¹²⁸ Dalglish, *Hymnody of Earth*, 135.

Poem: To My Mother

Printed in: *Entries*

Published: 1994

To My Mother

I was your rebellious son,
do you remember? Sometimes
I wonder if you do remember,
so complete has your forgiveness been.

So complete has your forgiveness been
I wonder sometimes if it did not
precede my wrong, and I erred,
safe found, within your love

prepared ahead of me, the way home
or my bed at night, so that almost
I should forgive you, who perhaps
foresaw the worst that I might do,

and forgave before I could act,
causing me to smile now, looking back
to see how paltry was my worst,
compared to your forgiveness of it

already given. And this, then,
is the vision of that Heaven of which
we have heard, where those who love
each other have forgiven each other,

where, for that, the leaves are green,
the light a music in the air,
and all is unentangled,
and all is undismayed.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 319. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: To My Parents

Composer: Joshua Shank

Poem: To My Mother

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: Db4 - Bb5

Alto: F3 - D5

Tenor: Db3 - Ab4

Bass: Db2 - Eb4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: G Minor, Ab Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 6:00'

Character Words: Burdened, content, tender

Publisher: G. Schirmer, Inc. /50499566

Published: 2010

Notes:

Joshua Shank's "To My Parents" is a thoughtful and slowly building musical portrayal of Berry's poem "To My Mother." Shank shares his compositional intentions in a note within the choral score: "I tried to portray that sense of wandering and confusion that leads up to what I think is the revelation of true, unconditional love."¹³⁰ The setting begins in a quiet and meditative manner, with the opening theme presented only by treble voices. The music gradually increases in texture, tempo, and volume until the whole choir sings in homophony and the tonal center shifts from G Minor to Ab Major. As the work nears its end, the first theme is heard again, as Shank says: "clothed in a warmer harmony than before; like a transgression remembered fondly with overwhelming gratitude." Shank dedicated the work to both his parents, thus the work's difference in title from Berry's.

The work is challenging primarily for its demands in vocal range and size. Phrases are long and will require stagger-breathing, and much of the piece is sung by the chorus in eight-part divisi. The significant demands in the vocal registers are also notable. Both of these challenges may warrant a choral ensemble that consists of mature singers who have greater capacity in both range and breath support. However, Shank's vocal writing is otherwise simplistic, and the choral texture is largely homophonic. Ensembles who are capable of the work's vocal demands will likely navigate the melodic content with ease.

¹³⁰ Joshua Shank, "Notes From The Composer" in *To My Parents*, comp. Joshua Shank (G. Schirmer, Inc, 2015).

Poem: II
from “Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer”

Printed in: *Farming: A Hand Book*
Published: 1970

II

At night make me one with the darkness.
In the morning make me one with the light.¹³¹

¹³¹ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 148. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Make Me One

Composer: J. David Moore

Poem: II

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: 4-part round

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

SA voices: D4 - Eb5

TB voices: D3 - Eb4

Meter: 2/2

Key Signature: G Minor

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Approx 1:20'

Character Words: Solemn, repeating

Publisher: Fresh Ayre Music

Published: 2010

Notes:

This six-bar melody from J. David Moore is constructed as a 4-part round for chorus, and can be taught entirely by rote to choirs of all ages. The melody can be found in Moore's *A Little Book of Rounds*. It is notated in 2/2 and marked *Lento*, consisting of two phrases that ascend by leap and descend by step. The second phrase begins with an octave jump between two eighth notes, and may require diligent attention for precise intonation when teaching the melody. The four-part round outlines G minor and creates a solemn and rich sound.

Moore offers conductors complete flexibility in their treatment of this round, offering suggestions for turning the rounds of his book into "concert miniatures." He offers suggestions including: changing the key, solo/tutti performance forces, spatial separation, inclusion of melodic and percussion instruments, and singing with the audience.

Poem: The Satisfaction of the Mad Farmer

Printed in: *Farming: A Hand Book*

Published: 1970

The Satisfaction of the Mad Farmer

Growing weather; enough rain;
the cow's udder tight with milk;
the peach tree bent with its yield;
honey golden in the white comb;

the pastures deep in clover and grass,
enough and more than enough;

the ground, new worked, moist
and yielding underfoot, the feet
comfortable in it as roots;

the early garden: potatoes, onions,
peas, lettuce, spinach, cabbage, carrots,
radishes, marking their straight rows
with green, before the trees are leafed;

raspberries ripe and heavy amid their foliage,
currants shining red in clusters amid their foliage,
strawberries red ripe with the white
flowers still on the vines—picked
with the dew on them, before breakfast;

grape clusters heavy under broad leaves,
powdery bloom on fruit black with sweetness
—an ancient delight, delighting;

the bodies of children, joyful
without dread of their spending,
surprised at nightfall to be weary;

the bodies of women in loose cotton,
cool and closed in the evenings
of summer, like contented houses;

the bodies of men, competent in the heat
and sweat and weight and length
of the day's work, eager in their spending,

attending to nightfall, the bodies of women;

sleep after love, dreaming
white lilies blooming
coolly out of my flesh;

after sleep, the sense of being enabled
to go on with work, morning a clear gift;

the maidenhood of the day,
cobwebs unbroken in the dewy grass;

the work of feeding and clothing and housing,
done with more than enough knowledge
and with more than enough love
by men who do not have to be told;

any building well built the rafters
firm to the walls, the walls firm,
the joists without give,

the proportions clear,
the fitting exact, even unseen,
bolts and hinges that turn home
without a jiggle;

any work worthy
of the day's maidenhood;

any man whose words
lead precisely to what exists,
who never stoops to persuasion;

the talk of friends, lightened and cleared
by all that can be assumed;

deer tracks in the wet path,
the deer sprung from them, gone on;

live streams, live shiftings
of the sun in the summer woods;

the great hollow-trunked beech,
a landmark I loved to return to,
its leaves gold-lit on the silver
branches in the fall: blown down

after a hundred years of standing,
a footbridge over the stream;

the quiet in the woods of a summer morning,
the voice of a pewee passing through it
like a tight silver wire;

a little clearing among cedars,
white clover and wild strawberries
beneath an opening to the sky
—heavenly, I thought it,
so perfect; had I foreseen it
I would have desired it
no less than it deserves;

fox tracks in snow, the impact
of lightness upon lightness,
unendingly silent.

What I know of spirit is astir
in the world. The god I have always expected
to appear at the woods' edge, beckoning,
I have always expected to be
a great relisher of the world, its good
grown immortal in his mind.¹³²

¹³² Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 151. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: More than Enough

Composer: Susan LaBarr

Poem: Excerpts from “The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer”

Text Usage: Excerpted and reordered

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: G3 - C5

Tenor: C3 - F4

Bass: F2 - C4

Meter: 3/4, 4/4, 2/4

Key Signature: C Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:30’

Character Words: Warm, rich, gentle

Publisher: Walton Music / WW1754

Published: 2019

Notes:

Susan LaBarr’s “More than Enough” is a beautiful work for divisi SATB chorus, and could be accomplished by ensembles of various skill levels. It should be noted that the composer has adapted Berry’s words into her own format, excerpting and reordering Berry’s words to create a format that only mildly resembles the poem from which it is taken. The reordered text is presented in five stanzas, of which stanzas one, two, and five all conclude with the same line: “enough, and more than enough.” LaBarr acknowledges this textual refrain musically, incorporating a choral refrain (IV-V-I) that brings closure to each respective stanza. Similarly, stanzas three and four, which break from the established pattern, contain the most musical variety, namely a busier texture that incorporates polyphony, increased rhythmic momentum, and louder dynamics (it is the first *forte* marking of the score).

The harmonic progressions within the work are simple and beautiful, and notably abstain from authentic cadences (or any movement to the dominant) until the choral refrains at the end of stanzas one, two, and five. The vocal writing sits in a lower register for most voices, particularly Basses and Altos. The majority of vocal divisi occurs in the Tenor-Basses, and four-part splits are common in low registers, creating a warm color but requiring a resonant delivery of low harmonies and stable intonation from the singers. The composer indicates that the work may be performed a half step higher, likely to accommodate these low-register harmonies.

Poem: VI

From *Sabbaths*, 1999

Printed in: *This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New*

Published: 2013

VI

We Travelers, walking to the sun, can't see
Ahead, but looking back the very light
That blinded us shows us the way we came,
Along which blessings now appear, risen
As if from sightlessness to sight, and we,
By blessing brightly lit, keep going toward
That blessed light that yet to us is dark.¹³³

¹³³ Berry, *This Day*, 200. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Walking to the Sun

Composer: Dominick DiOrio

Poem: VI

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Piano, Clarinet, Viola, Crotales

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - G5

Alto: Bb3 - E5

Tenor: C3 - A4

Bass: F2 - E4

Meter: 3/4, 4/4

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 6:40'

Character Words: Bright, steady, ethereal

Publisher: Hal Leonard / 00286294

Published: 2019

Notes:

Dominick DiOrio was commissioned to write “Walking To The Sun” to commemorate the Centennial Celebration of Anderson University. DiOrio shared in his own words regarding the poignancy of using Wendell Berry’s text for the occasion: “Berry artfully captures the sense of wonder and uncertainty present in walking forward into the sun, a light that also illuminates the path we have traveled.”¹³⁴

This setting for chorus is wonderfully inventive. DiOrio calls his musical setting of the text “bright and partnered.” His writing for Bb clarinet and viola requires skilled players. The two instruments are often paired and feature complex overlapping rhythms with each other; both parts also cover the extremities of the instrument’s range. The piano writing is largely simple and steady, and provides a forward pulse for the choir. DiOrio calls the choral writing “always moving and rarely static.” The writing for chorus is manageable for many choirs but requires attentiveness in subdivision and strong independence of voice parts, as much of the texture is polyphonic. The chorus sings several elongated and ascending chords within which individual voice parts move independently, so that the fabric changes with every quarter note pulse. The chorus also explores shifts in vocal tone - score markings include *warm*, *cold*, and *hushed*.

¹³⁴ Dominick DiOrio, “Performance Notes” in *Walking To The Sun*, comp. Dominick DiOrio (Hal Leonard LLC, 2019).

Poem: IV

From *Sabbaths*, 2003

Printed in: *Given: New Poems*

Published: 2005

IV

The little stream sings
in the crease of the hill.
It is the water of life. It knows
nothing of death, nothing.
And this is the morning
of Christ's resurrection.
The tomb is empty. There is
no death. Death is our illusion,
our wish to belong only
to ourselves, which is our freedom
to kill one another.
From this sleep may we too
rise, as out of the dark grave.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Wendell Berry, *Given: New Poems* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker Hoard, 2005), 125. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Little Stream Sings

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: IV

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - G5

Alto: A3 - B4

Tenor: D3 - G4

Bass: E2 - B3

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: G Major, A Major, D Minor

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 5:10'

Character Words: Flowing, sectional, hopeful

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2018

Notes:

In a 2017 open letter to the Penn State Concert Choir, composer Andrew Maxfield offered musical context to his composition “The Little Stream Sings” by sharing his own interpretation of Berry’s text: “This text invites us first to consider death (of a certain kind) as a human fabrication and, second, to rise above employing our agency to perpetuate this ‘innovation.’” He goes on to equate Berry’s image of a little stream to “Learning to hear and follow the best voice within you.”¹³⁶

The resulting work for chorus is one which explores the spectrum of imagery within Berry’s text. The “little stream” motive is introduced in a hummed melody and returns throughout the piece. The harmonic language is bright and grows in complexity as the piece progresses, as does the choral texture. Darker harmonic colors come with the text “Death is our illusion,” building to a peak on the words “freedom to kill one another.” Maxfield includes a musical quotation of the Southern hymn tune “In the Sweet By and By,” which he develops as a segway to the return of the original key and the “little stream” motive.

This work is challenging for its abrupt changes in key signature and its frequent divisi voicings. Moments of divisi polyphony require strong independence from all voice parts. However, the voice leading is predictable and the vocal range is fairly narrow for all parts, making this a fitting challenge for advanced high school choirs and above.

¹³⁶ Andrew Maxfield, “The Little Stream Sings,” Andrew Maxfield, Composer, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://andrewmaxfield.org/blogs/musings/the-little-stream-sings>.

Poem: III Look Out
 From *Sabbaths*, 2003

Printed in: *Given: New Poems*
 Published: 2005

III Look Out

Come to the window, look out, and see
 the valley turning green in remembrance
 of all springs past and to come, the woods
 perfecting with immortal patience
 the leaves that are the work of all of time,
 the sycamore whose white limbs shed
 the history of a man's life with their old bark,
 the river quivering under the morning's breath
 like the touched skin of a horse, and you will see
 also the shadow cast upon it by fire, the war
 that lights its way by burning the earth.

Come to your windows, people of the world,
 look out at whatever you see wherever you are,
 and you will see dancing upon it that shadow.
 You will see that your place, wherever it is,
 your house, your garden, your shop, your forest, your farm,
 bears the shadow of its destruction by war
 which is the economy of greed which is plunder
 which is the economy of wrath which is fire.
 The Lords of War sell the earth to buy fire,
 they sell the water and air of life to buy fire.
 They are little men grown great by willingness
 to drive whatever exists into its perfect absence.
 Their intention to destroy any place is solidly founded
 upon their willingness to destroy every place.

Every household of the world is at their mercy,
 the households of the farmer and the otter and the owl
 are at their mercy. They have no mercy.
 Having hate, they can have no mercy.
 Their greed is the hatred of mercy.

Their pockets jingle with the small change of the poor.
Their power is the willingness to destroy
everything for knowledge which is money
which is power which is victory
which is ashes sown by the wind.

Leave your windows and go out, people of the world,
go into the streets, go into the fields, go into the woods
and along the streams. Go together, go alone.
Say no to the Lords of War which is Money
which is Fire. Say no by saying yes
to the air, to the earth, to the trees,
yes to the grasses, to the rivers, to the birds
and the animals and every living thing, yes
to the small houses, yes to the children. Yes.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Berry, *Given*, 123-124. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: Look Out

Composer: Joan Szymko

Poem: III Look Out

Text Usage: Full

Voicings: SATB (moderate divisi)

SSAA (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

SATB

Soprano: A3 - A5

Alto: A3 - E5

Tenor: C3 - A4

Bass: F2 - E4

SSAA

Soprano I: A3 - A5

Soprano II: A3 - F5

Alto I: F3 - E5

Alto II: F3 - E5

Meter: Mixed

Key Signature: C Major, G Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 7:50'

Character Words: Longing, Forlorn, Hopeful

Publisher: Joan Szymko Music / JS-086, JS-088 Published: 2017, 2018

Notes:

Joan Szymko's "Look Out" is a stirring and powerful setting of Wendell Berry's poem, which ponders the exploitation of the Earth enacted by "Lords of War" operating in the interests of economic greed. Szymko shares her experience selecting the text: "Wendell Berry's poem gave me a vessel in which to pour my grief. Grief at the seemingly bottomless, soulless greed of those who wield power over land, people, governments, information - over the future."¹³⁸ She goes on to share that her musical setting mirrors the "long arc" of Berry's text, which ultimately concludes on a note of hope and a call to action. Szymko calls the conclusion "really a beginning- a gathering of energy and of courage-of heart."

This work was originally composed for SSAA choir, commissioned by the ensemble Women in Harmony of Portland, Maine. Since its commission Szymko has adapted the work for SATB ensemble as well, retaining the same keys and writing for piano. The piece is roughly eight minutes long and covers a significant amount of text. Simple recurrent themes in the piano and vocal writing bring a sense of cohesion to the piece. The work calls for solos (marked *recitativo*) which are interspersed within the choral texture. A remarkable amount of the writing for chorus is in unison, contrasted with striking moments of divisi homophonic writing. This piece could be accomplishable for advanced high school choirs or above.

¹³⁸ Joan Szymko, "Program Notes" in *Look Out*, comp. Joan Szymko (Joan Szymko Music, 2018).

Poem: The Rejected Husband

Printed in: *Given: New Poems*

Published: 2005

After the storm and the new
stillness of the snow, he returns
to the graveyard, as though
he might lift the white coverlet,
slip in beside her as he used to do,
and again feel, beneath his hand,
her flesh quicken and turn warm.
But he is not her husband now.
To participate in resurrection, one
first must be dead. And he goes
back into the whitened world, alive.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Berry, *Given*, 11. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: After the StormFrom: *Crimson Stain*

Composer: Larry Nickel

Poem: The Rejected Husband

Text Usage: Adapted

Voicing: SATB (moderate divisi), S Solo

Forces: Piano, cello

Ranges:

Soprano: F#4 - F#5

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: E3 - F#4

Bass: Eb2 - C#4

Meter: 4/4

Key Signature: D Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4:05'

Character Words: Lush, jazz-inspired, soloistic

Publisher: Cypress Choral Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

“After the Storm” is the eighth movement from Larry Nickel’s cantata *Crimson Stain*. The cantata explores the themes of war - Nickel is Canadian and composed *Crimson Stain* in the centennial year of the WWI Battle of Passendale, in which the Canadian Corps fought. The eighth movement sets Berry’s poem “The Rejected Husband” which depicts a husband’s visit to his wife’s grave. Nickel adapted the text and reversed the gender roles to create the scene of a wife visiting her husband’s grave. The movement is scored for chorus, piano, and cello, and largely features a soprano soloist. Following the first vocal entrance of the chorus, the soloist takes on the role of narrator (Nickel indicates that they step forward) and sings the text in its entirety, joined intermittently by the chorus in unison or echoed responses. The movement is available for individual purchase, but conductors should be aware of its solo-heavy writing (it has also been arranged for soprano and piano).

Nickel’s writing is beautiful and colored by jazz harmonies and chromatic writing. The writing for chorus is largely homophonic, as the chorus provides a sonic backdrop or choral response to the soloists’s singing. The choral texture expands to eight-part harmonies in a few instances, and soprano splits are particularly common. The cello provides additional coloring in sweeping legato phrases, but its melodic material largely doubles that of the piano. It may not be essential to a performance if no cellist is available.

Poem: The New Roof

Printed in: Farming: A Hand Book

Published: 1970

The New Roof

On the housetop, the floor of the boundless
where birds and storms fly and disappear,
and the valley opened over our heads, a leap
of clarity between the hills, we bent five days
in the sun, tearing free the old roof, nailing on
the new, letting the sun touch for once
in fifty years the dusky rafters, and then
securing the house again in its shelter and shade.
Thus like a little ledge a piece of my history
has come between me and the sky.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 128. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: New Roof
From: *At Home*

Composer: Timothy C. Takach

Poem: The New Roof

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: Flute, Clarinet

Ranges:

Soprano: D4 - A#5

Alto: A3 - D5

Tenor: F#3 - F#4

Bass: E2 - D4

Meter: 6/8

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Medium-Easy

Duration: 2:45'

Character Words: Lilted, hearty, ascending

Publisher: Timothy C. Takach Publications

Published: 2019

Notes:

“New Roof” is the second movement from Timothy C. Takach’s larger work for chorus *At Home*. Takach selected poems of Wendell Berry that were relevant to the work’s commission - the celebration of a spouse’s 70th birthday. This particular text was chosen because the spouse spent his career as a realtor, and his wife requested that the physicality of houses be incorporated into the work. Thus Takach chose to set Berry’s “The New Roof.” This lilted setting for chorus wonderfully portrays the scene that Berry sets in his poetry. Ascending leaps in the vocal writing evoke a sense of levity. Takach also remarks “The rising arpeggios in the winds are constantly searching upwards, let loose from the confines of the house to reach the boundless.”¹⁴¹ The choral texture is primarily homophonic and contains more rhythmic variety than the other movements within *At Home*. Takach creates a sense of heartiness in the rhythmic patterns he chooses, placing accented and staccato groupings of three eighth notes in the woodwinds to conjure the image of hammer strokes. The melodic writing is slightly more complex than the other movements primarily because of its frequent leaps, but the harmonic language is quite simple and remains rooted in A Major, a continuation of the key established in the first movement.

¹⁴¹ Takach, *At Home*.

Poem: The Want of Peace

Printed in: *Openings*

Published: 1968

The Want of Peace

All goes back to the earth,
and so I do not desire
pride of excess or power,
but the contentments made
by men who have had little:
the fisherman's silence
receiving the river's grace,
the gardener's musing on rows.

I lack the peace of simple things.
I am never wholly in place.
I find no peace or grace.
We sell the world to buy fire,
our way lighted by burning men,
and that has bent my mind
and made me think of darkness
and wish for the dumb life of roots.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 78. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Want of PeaceFrom: *Terra Nostra*

Poem: The Want of Peace

Composer: Stacy Garrop

Text Usage: Full, one sentence modified

Voicing: SATB (much divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: Bb3 - G5

Alto: G3 - Db5

Tenor: F3 - Eb4

Bass: C3 - Bb3

Meter: 4/4, 3/4

Key Signature: C Minor

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 5:30'

Character Words: Brooding, hushed, hymn-like

Publisher: Theodore Presser Company

Published: 2014

Notes:

"The Want of Peace" is a movement from Stacy Garrop's oratorio *Terra Nostra*, which focuses on the relationship between the health of the earth and the actions of mankind. The composer shares that "The Want of Peace speaks to us at the climax of the oratorio, reminding us that we can find harmony with the planet if we choose to live more simply, and to recall that we ourselves came from the earth."¹⁴³ Musically, the work reflects the dissatisfaction Berry portrays in his text. Berry desires the simple contentments of nature, but finds "no peace or grace" in the face of an exploited earth that is sacrificed for profit. Garrop explores dark choral timbres and ambiguous minor tonality. The first stanza contains treble voices singing in low registers and Tenors and Basses sustaining fourths and fifths in long tones. The second stanza is in a hymn-like choral texture, expanding in dynamics and register and repeated twice. Brief dissonances and chromatic passages heighten the effectiveness of Berry's words; the movement is meditative and brooding.

Terra Nostra is scored for soloists, SATB chorus, children's chorus, and orchestra. Garrop has also created a chamber orchestration of the work, and sells this movement individually scored for piano and chorus. The choral writing in this movement is fairly simple but slow-moving and not strictly tonal, requiring excellent intonation. Divisi splits are also common in the second stanza of text.

¹⁴³ Stacy Garrop, "Terra Nostra: An Oratorio," Stacy Garrop, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.garrop.com/TerraNostra/>.

Poem: The Finches

Printed in: *Openings*

Published: 1968

The Finches

The ears stung with cold
sun and frost of dawn
in early April, comes

the song of winter finches,
their crimson bright, then
dark as they move into

and then against the light.
May the year warm them
soon. May they soon go

north with their singing
and the season follow.
May the bare sticks soon

live, and our minds go free
of the ground
into the shining of trees.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 69. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Finches
From: *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: The Finches

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SSAA

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano I: D4 - F#5

Soprano II: B3 - D5

Alto I: A3 - Bb4

Alto II: G3 - B4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: G Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 1:05'

Character Words: Fluttering, crisp, free

Publisher: Oolitic Music

Published: 1995

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish suggests that this minute-long work for treble chorus might be most effectively performed by a small chamber group. The work is completely homophonic, and its rhythms are intricate and complex. Dalglish advises that the rhythms need not be performed exactly as written however, instead offering that singers can “use them to get a feeling for the pauses and accelerations of the text much as with the ‘free precision’ of plainsong.”¹⁴⁵ The voice parts commonly ascend and descend in parallel motion, resting on various major triads. Though Dalglish provides a key signature, the harmony is untethered and migrates freely from chord to chord. This piece could likely be performed without a conductor, and may serve as an excellent challenge for a treble quartet or select treble voices from within a larger ensemble.

¹⁴⁵ Dalglish, *Hymnody of Earth*, 42.

Poem: The Broken Ground

Printed in: *The Broken Ground*

Published: 1964

The Broken Ground

The opening out and out,
 body yielding body:
 the breaking
 through which the new
 comes, perching
 above its shadow
 on the piling up
 darkened broken old
 husks of itself:
 bud opening to flower
 opening to fruit opening
 to the sweet marrow
 of the seed—
 taken
 from what was, from
 what could have been.
 What is left
 is what is.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Berry, *New Collected Poems*, 29. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: The Broken Ground
From *Hymnody of Earth*

Composer: Malcolm Dalglish

Poem: The Broken Ground

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: AATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Alto I: A3 - D5

Alto II: G3 - A4

Tenor: G3 - A4

Baritone: D3 - F4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: Not provided

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 3:25'

Character Words:

Publisher: Ooolitic Music

Published: 2004

Notes:

Malcolm Dalglish's "The Broken Ground" was commissioned by The Jenny Lind Singers of Augustana College in 2004, nearly two decades after his initial publication of *Hymnody of Earth*. However, Dalglish considers this setting to still be a part of the larger song cycle. The setting is a lively and blooming work for AATB chorus, thoughtfully coloring Berry's words which describe the life cycle of growing things. The voicing is somewhat unique, and calls for a limited tessitura across all voice parts, allowing for close-voiced harmonies that expand from a single note. Quick rhythms and a frequently changing time signature give the music an exciting and nimble character. Unique articulations are notable as well - singers close to voiced consonants on certain words like "taken" and "from," and close to hums in the middle of phrases before continuing the text. Much of the choral texture is homophonic, and though Dalglish does not provide a key signature, the piece is quite tonal, centering most frequently around D Major and G Major.

This work is accomplishable for many ensembles and offers a unique sound that may provide variety to a concert program. Its AATB scoring will require some navigating: the work is in a 5-voice texture and notated in three treble staves (the third staff is in 8vb tenor notation). It can be accomplished by SATB ensembles, but will require clear voice assignments from the conductor and may involve singers switching from staff to staff.

Poem: Prayer after Eating

Printed in: *The Country of Marriage*

Published: 1973

Prayer after Eating

I have taken in the light
that quickened eye and leaf.
May my brain be bright with praise
of what I eat, in the brief blaze
of motion and of thought.
May I be worthy of my meat.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Wendell Berry, *The Country of Marriage* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973), 12.

Choral Title: Prayer after Eating

Composer: Andrew Maxfield

From collection: *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*

Poem: "Prayer after Eating"

Text Usage: Full

Voicing: SATB

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano: Eb4 - F5

Alto: A3 - Bb4

Tenor: C3 - F4

Bass: F2 - D4

Meter: 6/4, 4/4, 3/4

Key Signature: Bb Major

Difficulty: Medium-Advanced

Duration: 2:10'

Character Words: Jazzy, Barbershop, Nostalgic

Publisher: Yalecrest Music

Published: 2013

Notes:

Andrew Maxfield's brief setting of this text is lush and harmonically rich. A primarily low and narrow tessitura invites singers into a warm choral tone. With only momentary exceptions, the piece is entirely homophonic, and there is no divisi. The challenge of this work comes in its chromaticism and frequent use of secondary chords. Voice-leading will likely be a challenge to young or inexperienced singers. Maxfield employs a number of harmonic techniques that contribute to a jazz-inspired sound. Suspensions, chromatic voice leading, and seventh chords are frequent. Despite a few instances of unexpected voice-leading (common-tone diminished sevenths appear repeatedly), the piece remains rooted in Bb Major tonality. Thus, despite the frequent non-chord tones, solfege could be a very useful tool for teaching this piece. A small descending motif is threaded throughout the piece, first introduced in the sopranos and re-appearing twice, each time paired with another chromatically descending voice.

Section: IV

Excerpted from essay: "Healing"

Printed in: *What are People For?*

Published: 1990

IV

Good work finds the way between pride and despair.

It graces with health. It heals with grace.

It preserves the given so that it remains a gift.

By it, we lose loneliness:

we clasp the hands of those who go before us, and the hands of those who come after us;

we enter the little circle of each other's arms,

and the larger circle of lovers whose hands are joined in a dance,

and the larger circle of all creatures, passing in and out of life, who move also in a dance, to a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it except in fragments.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 10. Reprinted with permission.

Choral Title: We Clasp the Hands
Essay: “Healing”

Composer: Carol Barnett
Text Usage: Excerpted

Voicing: SSA

Forces: A cappella

Ranges:

Soprano I: E4 - G5

Soprano II: C4 - C#5

Alto: G3 - A4

Meter: 2/2, 3/4

Key Signature: A Major

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3:45'

Character Words: Playful, jubilant, dance-like

Publisher: Carol Barnett

Published: 2016

Notes:

Carol Barnett composed “We Clasp the Hands” for the Aurora Chorus of Portland Oregon to, in her words, “celebrate the group as a welcoming and empowering community as well as marking their 25th Anniversary.”¹⁴⁹ Joan Szymko, the ensemble’s artistic director, selected the text for Barnett to set: an excerpt from an essay of Berry’s entitled “Healing.” The excerpted passage (which begins “...we clasp the hands”) speaks to the intergenerational community that is inherent to the circle of life. Barnett’s choral setting captures this sense of community through this playful and joyous setting for treble chorus. Syncopated rhythms and abrupt melodic leaps evoke a dance-like character. The choral texture alternates frequently between brief imitative polyphony and homophony. Similarly, the articulation alternates between legato passages and crisp percussive rhythms. The overarching effect of this setting portrays the image Berry describes: all voices are “joined in the dance.”

This work is moderately challenging and could be accomplished by intermediate and advanced treble choirs. The piece begins quite simply, but steadily increases in complexity as it continues. Fast and syncopated rhythms are frequent, and imitation evolves from a two-part texture (two voices being paired), to three-part imitation in the latter half of the piece. Though the key signature never changes, there are several momentary tonicizations in different keys, which creates passages filled with accidentals in all voice parts that are challenging to read. Diligent work must be done to perform the technical demands of this piece while retaining the dance-like character it portrays.

¹⁴⁹ Carol Barnett, “Program Note” in *We Clasp The Hands*, comp. Carol Barnett (Beady Eyes Publishing, 2016).

Choral Title: On a Forest Path

Composer: John Newell

From: *A Timbered Choir*

Poem: Nine short poems presented in full, selected from *A Timbered Choir* and *New Collected Poems*

Voicing: SATB (minimal divisi)

Forces: Piano

Ranges:

Soprano: C4 - Ab5

Alto: Bb3 - C5

Tenor: C3 - G4

Bass: F2 - C4

Meter: Mixed, simple

Key Signature: C Minor

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 10:10'

Character Words: Episodic, evolving, thematic

Publisher: Abierto Music

Published: 2017

Notes:

John Newell's "On a Forest Path" is the final work in the composer's collection of Wendell Berry settings, entitled *A Timbered Choir*. This piece is notably different from Newell's others: he incorporates nine short poems in the piece rather than a single poem, and the work is longer than the others in duration, roughly ten minutes. Each poem featured in its entirety, and a recurring piano theme acts as an interlude between the musical settings of each poem. All of the text focuses on one's encounters in nature. The composer shares about the work in the score's notes: "*On a Forest Path* depicts various scenes that the poet encounters on his walks through the woods, and his reflections upon them. The piano takes on the role of the poet."¹⁵⁰

Several movements in *A Timbered Choir* are quite short and quite difficult, and are befitting of advanced or professional ensembles. This final setting is much more approachable for average choral ensembles, and may serve as an excellent first piece for conductors who are considering programming from Newell's set. The writing is lyrical and largely tonal - the recurring piano theme centers around the notes of the C minor pentatonic scale, and offers a harmonic stability not found in many other settings within *A Timbered Choir*.

¹⁵⁰ John Newell, "Performance Note" in *A Timbered Choir*, comp. John Newell (Abierto Music, 2017).

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

“Words and music, I always assume, began together. In poetry, words remember song. In my own work, for a long time, the words have seemed to be in search of their native or appropriate music.”¹⁵¹

-Wendell Berry

Choral compositions exist at the intersection of music and text. Most commonly, the text comes first and the music follows. Berry says his words seem to be in search of their *native or appropriate* music. Composers, for their part, encounter the text and construct their musical interpretation, animating Berry’s words in elements of melody, structure, harmony, pacing, and texture. This study has surveyed the works of over forty composers who have all sought to answer the question: what is *native or appropriate* music for Berry’s words? Across this collection of settings, the answer is clearly varied. Interpretations of Wendell’s words, all earnest in their portrayal, are set in a variety of musical styles and evoke different musical qualities. This is the most clearly on display in the various interpretations of a single text. Berry’s poem “The Wild Geese,” for example, is portrayed musically as powerful and march-like (Malcolm Dalglish), brisk and spinning (Joan Szymko), mixed meter and jazz-infused (John Newell), and melodically simple and hymn-like (Earlene Rentz). It is clear that there is no uniform musical or

¹⁵¹ Wendell Berry, “Program Notes” in *Hymnody of Earth*, comp. Malcolm Dalglish (Oolitic Music, 2005), 121.

vocal aesthetic that Berry's writing influences within choral music. However, upon examining the full collection of settings, notable similarities can be found among various compositions and composers.

Wendell Berry's Kentucky regionalism and prominent sense of place has inspired some composers to imitate the musical influences of Appalachian and American music in their settings. This is prominent in the settings of composer Andrew Maxfield, who listed "the idea of a hillside farm in Kentucky" as part of the musical inspiration for his choral settings.¹⁵² Maxfield studied regional hymn collections including *The Kentucky Harmony* and *The Sacred Harp* as he set Berry's work. These influences can be heard across Maxfield's settings, particularly in the sacred-harp stylings of "One Household High and Low," contemporary fiddle techniques in "For the Future," and the quotation of a Southern Hymn tune in "The Little Stream Sings." Dave Brubeck, similarly, credits Berry's words with inspiring an American sound in "The Wheel." Brubeck shares that Berry's words evoke the music of his childhood as his parents danced the steps to the reel and square dance, and quotes an American folk tune in his setting.¹⁵³

American musical idioms surface among several other settings of Berry's poetry, though not as deliberately stated by the composers above. Malcolm Dalglish cites American folk hymn styles as influential to the songs within his song cycle *Hymnody of Earth*, and suggests that choirs perform the works with an "uncultured timbre" that is bright and free of vibrato, keeping with the raw modal harmonies associated with this style.¹⁵⁴ J. David Moore also addresses his incorporation of Southern folk elements in his choral writing, noting "the flavor of Appalachian fiddle" within his setting of "Come, Let Us Meet Here Together."¹⁵⁵ We may also consider

¹⁵² Andrew Maxfield, liner notes for *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music*.

¹⁵³ Brubeck, "Program Notes" in *The Wheel*.

¹⁵⁴ Malcolm Dalglish, "Program Notes" in *Hymnody of Earth*, comp. Malcolm Dalglish (Ooolitic Music, 2005), 121.

¹⁵⁵ J. David Moore, "Composer's Notes," Graphite Publishing, Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://graphitepublishing.com/product/come-let-us-meet-here-together/>.

Timothy Takach's *At Home* as a work whose music resembles a distinctly American sound, due to its melodic treatment of the flute and clarinet which is highly reminiscent of the pastoral soundscapes of Aaron Copland's writing.

The aforementioned pieces (including the full collections of Maxfield, Dalglish, and Takach) account for 30 settings. Thus roughly a third of the full collection of works surveyed in this document adheres to what listeners may call an American sound. But beyond that, it is significant that 37 of the 41 composers in this collection are American. Even while Berry's writing does not uniformly conjure an American sound, it is clear to see that his poetry does have a presence in contemporary American choral music.

Another interesting commonality emerges when surveying the full collection: over seventy five percent of the choral settings of Berry's poetry have been composed in just the last two decades. Berry has been granting permissions for choral compositions since the 1990s, and he has given his publisher Counterpoint Press the freedom to grant approvals for musical settings without his consultation. So why might his poetry be experiencing such a surge in choral music in the last several years? The cause may be due to simple explanations, such as increased popularity and easier access to his publisher. But let us consider the idea that if Berry's words are in search of their native music, so too is today's choral music—and today's world—in search of *his words*. Words which praise the peace and wonder available through attention and devotion to the natural world. Words which paint ordinary things—one's place, community, work, and family—with reverence and value. Words which challenge us to face the realities of environmental and cultural destruction at the hands of corporate greed and global warfare. His words, unchanged in their message, are both timeless and timely. His advocacy for a localized, unplugged life is perhaps more foreign to today's culture than ever before, and yet its benefits

speak to us with modern-day relevance. A 2019 article published by Vox is aptly titled “Wendell Berry is still ahead of us.”

The relevance of Berry’s voice to modern culture has brought about its affiliation with many commissions. Composers have set Wendell Berry’s poetry as words of response to significant cultural events, including the Boston Marathon bombing, the politically divisive 2016 Presidential Election, and “violence that has become endemic in our communities.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, his poetry has been used within several large-scale works which focus on mankind’s care or exploitation of the Earth, including Libby Larsen’s *Missa Gaia*, Michael Conley’s *Appalachian Requiem*, and Stacy Garrop’s oratorio *Terra Nostra*. Beyond specific commissions, though, Berry’s words still draw composers, singers, and audiences to connect with his writing. David Brunner chose to use Berry’s writing for his 2000 ACDA Brock Commission, and shares: “I am touched by Berry’s contemplative voice and the inspirational nature and reverence in each and every word, a profound sincerity for the wonder of life.”¹⁵⁷

In 2012, Wendell Berry was the speaker for the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities in Washington, DC. In his lecture, entitled “It All Turns on Affection,” he shared his thoughts on the role of imagination and its relationship with humanity:

For humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it. To have a place, to live and belong in a place, to live from a place without destroying it, we must imagine it. . . . As imagination enables sympathy, sympathy enables affection. And it is in affection that we find the possibility of a neighborly, kind, and conserving economy.¹⁵⁸

Perhaps the greatest gift that the choral settings of Berry offer is the chance to enter into this imagination as we sing. The choral artform is built around our engagement with text,

¹⁵⁶ Orem, “Performance Instructions” in *Absalom, Absalom*.

¹⁵⁷ Brunner, “Program Note” in *The Circles of Our Lives*.

¹⁵⁸ “Wendell E. Berry,” National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 2012, <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-biography>.

and a captivating performance requires our *empathy* as much as it does our technical skill. Through the choral settings we are able to approach Wendell's words in the way he desires us to: with our imagination. In singing his poetry, we have the chance to reflect on our *own* known places, and remember with whom and what we share our place. As we sing, we do so with our affection and care. To earnestly sing the words of Wendell Berry is to see our place, community, and planet with the same reverence and devotion that he does.

Recommendations for Further Study

Berry writes that there is a kinship among the arts, and that "a knowledge of one imparts a sympathy for others and can be useful in learning another."¹⁵⁹ Conductors reading this paper are encouraged to spend time immersed in the excellent poetry of Wendell Berry, along with his books of essays and works of fiction. If his words evoke inspiration from composers, so too can they inspire our interpretations as conductors. Those wishing to spend more time with Berry's writing may consider purchasing one of the many wonderful collections of his poetry which have been published. Two collections which together contain the majority of the poems in this study are *New Collected Poems* (2012) and *This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New* (2013). Also recommended are his many works of fiction. His collections of short stories are a wonderful place to begin reading. Berry's essays can be read individually or within his many published book collections of essays. His 1977 book *The Unsettling of America* is regarded as one of the key texts of the environmental movement in 20th century America.

A few select choral settings exist which have been left out of this study due to their exceptional difficulty, fragmented use of Berry's text, or large orchestration. This includes Aaron

¹⁵⁹ Paul Merchant, *Wendell Berry* (Lewistown, ID: Confluence Press, 1991), 31.

Jay Kernis's four-movement set *The Wheel of Time, the Dance*, Richard Waters's choral-orchestral work *The Courage for Love*, and a movement from Z. Randall Stroope's *Carmina Pax*. However, excellent recordings are available online for reference to those who wish to investigate these works further.

APPENDIX A

CHORAL WORKS LISTED IN ORDER OF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY POEM

Poem: The Peace of Wild Things

Title	Composer	Page
The Peace of Wild Things	John Newell	31
The Peace of Wild Things	Nicholas White	32
The Peace of Wild Things	Jenni Brandon	33
The Peace of Wild Things	Mark Sirett	34
The Peace of Wild Things	Jake Runestad	35
The Peace of Wild Things	Michael Conley	36
The Peace of Wild Things	Shawn Crouch	37
The Peace of Wild Things	Emily Feld	38
The Peace of Wild Things	Sean Ivory	39
The Peace of Wild Things	Matthew J. Olson	40
The Peace of Wild Things	Gwyneth Walker	41
The Peace of Wild Things	Malcolm Dalglish	42
The Peace of Wild Things	Joan Szymko	43

Poem: I. *I go among trees and sit still.*

I Go Among Trees	Conner J. Koppin	45
I Go Among The Trees and Sit Still	William Campbell	46
I Go Among Trees	Giselle Wyers	47
I Go Among Trees	John Newell	48
I Go Among Trees	Earlene Rentz	49
I Go Among Trees	Robert Paterson	50

Poem: X. *The dark around us, come*

The Dark Around Us, Come	Giselle Wyers	52
Come, Let Us Meet Here Together	J. David Moore	53
One Household, High and Low	Andrew Maxfield	54
The Dark Around Us	Gwyneth Walker	55
All The Earth Shall Sing (The dark around us come)	William Campbell	56

The Dark Around Us	Malcolm Dalglish	57
<u>Poem: I. <i>Slowly, slowly, they return</i></u>		
Slowly, Slowly They Return	John Newell	59
Great Trees	Mary Alice Amidon	60
The Timbered Choir	Gwyneth Walker	61
The Timbered Choir	William Weinmann	62
A Timbered Choir	David Evan Thomas	63
Great Trees	Malcolm Dalglish	64
<u>Poem: The Wild Geese</u>		
The Wild Geese	John Newell	66
The Wild Geese	Malcolm Dalglish	67
Here	Joan Szymko	68
What We Need is Here	Earlene Rentz	69
What We Need is Here	James Deignan	70
<u>Poem: Song (4)</u>		
The Circles of Our Lives	David L. Brunner	72
Within the Circles of Our Lives	Giselle Wyers	73
Circles	Dave Brubeck	74
Within the Circles of Our Lives	Libby Larsen	75
<u>Poem: VIII (from "Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer")</u>		
Like a Leaf	Elizabeth Alexander	77
And When I Rise	Wendy Tuck	78
When I Rise Up	J. David Moore	79
<u>Poem: The Wheel</u>		
The Wheel	David L. Brunner	81
The Wheel	Dave Brubeck	82
<u>Poem: For the Future</u>		
For the Future	Andrew Maxfield	84
For the Future (a Round)	Malcolm Dalglish	85
<u>Poem: I. <i>Over the river in loud flood</i></u>		
Swallows in Air	John Newell	87
Over the River	Malcolm Dalglish	88

Poem: VII. *The clearing rests in song and shade*

The Clearing Rests	Andrew Maxfield	90
The Clearing Rests in Song and Shade	William Campbell	91

Poem: To Know the Dark

To Know the Dark	J. David Moore	93
To Know the Dark	Joan Szymko	94

Poem: To the Holy Spirit

To the Holy Spirit	Joan Szymko	96
To the Holy Spirit	Malcolm Dalglish	97

Poem: I. *Here where the world is being made*

Here where the world is being made	Andrew Maxfield	99
------------------------------------	-----------------	----

Poem: II. *A gracious Sabbath stood here while they stood*

A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here	Andrew Maxfield	101
-------------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: II. *Even while I dreamed I prayed*

A Timbered Choir	Robert Paterson	103
------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: VI. *Remembering that it happened once*

Remembering That It Happened Once	J. David Moore	105
-----------------------------------	----------------	-----

Poem: III. *I think of Gloucester, blind*

I think of Gloucester, blind	Andrew Maxfield	107
------------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: III. *To sit and look at light-filled leaves*

To Sit and Look at Light-Filled Leaves	Andrew Maxfield	109
--	-----------------	-----

Poem: IV. *Hate has no world*

Hate Has No World	Bradley Ellingboe	111
-------------------	-------------------	-----

Poem: IV. *The frog with lichen back*

The Frog With Lichened Back	John Newell	113
-----------------------------	-------------	-----

Poem: IV. *They sit together on the porch*

Together on the Porch	Timothy C. Takach	115
-----------------------	-------------------	-----

Poem: IV. Thrush song, stream song, holy love

Thrush Song	Malcolm Dalglish	117
-------------	------------------	-----

Poem: V. How long does it take to make the woods?

The Way to the Woods	Olli Kortekangas	119
----------------------	------------------	-----

Poem: V. The seed is in the ground

The Seed Is in the Ground	Andrew Maxfield	121
---------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: VI. What stood will stand, though all be fallen

What Stood Will Stand	Paul Halley	123
-----------------------	-------------	-----

Poem: VII. The Winter wren is back

The Winter Wren is Back	John Newell	125
-------------------------	-------------	-----

Poem: VII. There is a day

A Place	Timothy C. Takach	127
---------	-------------------	-----

Poem: X. Whatever is foreseen in joy

Whatever is Foreseen in Joy	Andrew Maxfield	129
-----------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: IX. Before we kill another child

Absalom, Absalom	Philip Orem	131
------------------	-------------	-----

Poem: Woods

Woods	Malcolm Dalglish	133
-------	------------------	-----

Poem: Stay Home

I am at Home	Timothy C. Takach	135
--------------	-------------------	-----

Poem: From the Crest

And When We Speak Together, Love	Andrew Maxfield	137
----------------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: Epitaph

Epitaph	Malcolm Dalglish	139
---------	------------------	-----

Poem: To My Mother

To My Parents	Joshua Shank	141
---------------	--------------	-----

Poem: II (from “Prayers and Sayings of the Mad Farmer”)

Make Me One	J. David Moore	143
-------------	----------------	-----

Poem: The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer

More than Enough	Susuan LaBarr	147
------------------	---------------	-----

Poem: VI. *We Travelers, walking to the sun*

Walking to the Sun	Dominick DiOrio	149
--------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: IV: *The little stream sings*

The Little Stream Sings	Andrew Maxfield	151
-------------------------	-----------------	-----

Poem: III Look Out

Look Out	Joan Szymko	154
----------	-------------	-----

Poem: The Rejected Husband

After the Storm	Larry Nickel	156
-----------------	--------------	-----

Poem: The New Roof

New Roof	Timothy C. Takach	158
----------	-------------------	-----

Poem: The Want of Peace

The Want of Peace	Stacy Garrop	160
-------------------	--------------	-----

Poem: The Finches

The Finches	Malcolm Dalglish	162
-------------	------------------	-----

Poem: The Broken Ground

The Broken Ground	Malcolm Dalglish	164
-------------------	------------------	-----

Poem: Prayer after Eating

Prayer after Eating	Andrew Maxfield	166
---------------------	-----------------	-----

Essay: “Healing”

We Clasp the Hands	Carol Barnett	168
--------------------	---------------	-----

Poem: [nine compiled short poems]

On a Forest Path	John Newell	169
------------------	-------------	-----

APPENDIX B

CHORAL WORKS LISTED BY COMPOSER

Composer	Title	Page
Elisabeth Alexander	Like a Leaf	77
Mary Alice Amidon	Great Trees	60
Carol Barnett	We Clasp the Hands	168
Jenni Brandon	The Peace of Wild Things	33
Dave Brubeck	Circles	74
	The Wheel	82
David Brunner	The Circles Of Our Lives	72
	The Wheel	81
William Campbell	<i>Set: Among The Trees</i>	
	The Clearing Rests in Song and Shade	91
	I Go Among the Trees and Sit Still	46
	All the Earth Shall Sing (The dark around us, come)	56
Michael Conley	The Peace of Wild Things	36
Shawn Crouch	The Peace of Wild Things	37
Malcolm Dalglish	<i>Set: Hymnody of Earth</i>	
	The Peace of Wild Things	42
	The Dark Around Us	57
	Great Trees	64
	The Wild Geese	67

	For the Future (a Round)	85
	Over the River	88
	To the Holy Spirit	97
	Thrush Song	117
	Woods	133
	Epitaph	139
	The Finches	162
	The Broken Ground	164
James Deignan	What We Need Is Here	70
Dominick DiOrion	Walking to the Sun	149
Bradley Ellingboe	Hate Has No World	111
Emily Feld	The Peace of Wild Things	38
Stacy Garrop	The Want of Peace	160
Paul Halley	What Stood Will Stand	123
Sean Ivory	The Peace of Wild Things	39
Aaron Jay Kernis	<i>Set: The Wheel of Time, the Dance</i>	
	Circles of Our Lives	
	Returning	
	The Wheel	
	In Rain	
Connor Koppin	I Go Among Trees	45
Olli Kortekangas	The Way to the Woods	119
Susan Labarr	More Than Enough	147
Libby Larsen	Within the Circles of Our Lives	75
Andrew Maxfield	<i>Set: Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music</i>	
	One Household High and Low	54
	For the Future	84

	The Clearing Rests	90
	Here Where the World Is Being Made	99
	A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here	101
	I Think of Gloucester, Blind	107
	To Sit and Look at Light-Filled Leaves	109
	The Seed is in the Ground	121
	Whatever is Foreseen in Joy	129
	And When We Speak Together, Love	137
	The Little Stream Sings	151
	Prayer After Eating	166
J. David Moore	Come, Let Us Meet Here Together	53
	When I Rise Up	79
	To Know the Dark	93
	Remembering That It Happened Once	105
	Make Me One	143
Larry Nickel	After the Storm	156
John Newell	<i>Set: A Timbered Choir</i>	
	The Peace of Wild Things	31
	I Go Among Trees	48
	The Wild Geese	66
	Swallows In Air	87
	Slowly, Slowly, They Return	59
	The Frog With Lichened Back	113
	The Winter Wren Is Back	125
	On a Forest Path	169
Matthew J. Olson	The Peace of Wild Things	40
Philip Orem	Absalom, Absalom	131
Robert Paterson	I Go Among Trees	50
Earlene Rentz	What We Need is Here	69
Jake Runestad	The Peace of Wild Things	35
Joshua Shank	To My Parents	141

Mark Sirett	The Peace of Wild Things	34
Joan Szymko	The Peace of Wild Things	43
	Here	68
	To Know the Dark	94
	To The Holy Spirit	96
	Look Out	154
Timothy C. Takach	<i>Set: At Home</i>	
	I am at Home	135
	New Roof	158
	A Place	127
	Together on the Porch	115
David Evan Thomas	A Timbered Choir	63
Wendy Tuck	And When I Rise	78
Gwyneth Walker	<i>Set: The Great Trees</i>	
	The Peace of Wild Things	41
	The Dark Around Us	55
	The Timbered Choir	61
William Weinmann	The Timbered Choir	62
Nicholas White	The Peace of Wild Things	32
Giselle Wyers	I Go Among Trees	47
	The Dark Around Us, Come	52
	Within the Circles of Our Lives	73

APPENDIX C

CHORAL WORKS LISTED BY VOICING AND DIFFICULTY

Unison, Canon, and 2-part

Composer	Title	Voicing	Difficulty	Page
Elizabeth Alexander	Like a Leaf	2-6 Pt Canon	1	77
J. David Moore	When I Rise Up	3-Pt Round	1	79
J. David Moore	Make Me One	4-Pt Round	1	143
Timothy Takach	Together on the Porch	2-Pt	1	115
Malcolm Dalglish	The Wild Geese	Unison SA	2	67
John Newell	The Frog With Lichened Back	Unison	3	113

Treble Chorus

Composer	Title	Voicing	Difficulty	Page
Mark Sirett	The Peace of Wild Things	SSA	1	34
David Brunner	The Circles of Our Lives	SA	2	72
Malcolm Dalglish	Epitaph	SSAA	2	139
Earlene Rentz	I Go Among Trees	SSAA	2	49
Carol Barnett	We Clasp the Hands	SSA	3	168
Malcolm Dalglish	Woods	SSA	3	133
Joan Szymko	The Peace of Wild Things	SSAA	3	43
Joan Szymko	Here	SSAA	3	68
John Newell	Swallows in Air	SSAA	3	87
Malcom Dalglish	The Finches	SSAA	3	162
Joan Szymko	To Know the Dark	SSAA	4	94
Sean Ivory	The Peace of Wild Things	SSAA	4	39
Joan Szymko	Look Out	SSAA	4	154
J. David Moore	To Know the Dark	SSAA	4	93

Tenor-Bass Chorus

Composer	Title	Voicing	Difficulty	Page
Andrew Maxfield	I Think of Gloucester, Blind	BB	2	107
David Brunner	The Circles of Our Lives	TTBB	2	72
James Deignan	What We Need is Here	TTB	3	70
Shawn Crouch	The Peace of Wild Things	TTBB	5	37

Mixed Chorus

Composer	Title	Voicing	Difficulty	Page
William Weinmann	The Timbered Choir	SAB	1	62
Mary Amidon	Great Trees	SATB	1	60
William Campbell	I Go Among the Trees and Sit...	SATB	1	46
	All the Earth Shall Sing	SATB	1	56
	The Clearing Rests in Song...	SATB	1	91
Malcolm Dalglish	To the Holy Spirit	SATB	1	97
Timothy C. Takach	A Place	SATB	1	127
	I am at Home	SATB	1	135
Wendy Tuck	And When I Rise	SATB	1	78
Nicholas White	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	1	32
Elizabeth Alexander	Like a Leaf	SATB	2	77
Malcolm Dalglish	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	2	42
	Epitaph	SAAT	2	139
	For the Future (a Round)	SSAAB	2	85
	The Dark Around Us	SSAB	2	57
	Great Trees	SSAB	2	64
Bradley Ellingboe	Hate Has No World	SATB	2	111
Emily Feld	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	2	38
Andrew Maxfield	One Household High and Low	SATB	2	54
Earlene Rentz	I Go Among Trees	SATB	2	49
Earlene Rentz	What We Need is Here	SATB	2	69
Timothy C. Takach	New Roof	SATB	2	158
Gwyneth Walker	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	2	41
	The Dark Around Us	SATB	2	55

David Brunner	The Wheel	SATB	3	81
Malcolm Dalglish	Thrush Song	SSAAB	3	117
James Deignan	What We Need Is Here	SATB	3	70
Connor J. Koppin	I Go Among Trees	SSATB	3	45
Susan Labarr	More than Enough	SATB	3	147
Andrew Maxfield	For the Future	SATB	3	84
John Newell	On a Forest Path	SATB	3	169
Larry Nickel	After the Storm	SATB	3	156
Matthew J. Olson	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	3	40
Robert Paterson	I Go Among Trees	SATB	3	50
	A Timbered Choir	SATB	3	103
Jake Runestad	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	3	35
Joshua Shank	To My Parents	SATB	3	141
Joan Szymko	To the Holy Spirit	SATB	3	96
	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	3	43
Dave Brubeck	Circles	SATB	4	74
	The Wheel	SATB	4	82
Malcolm Dalglish	The Broken Ground	AATB	4	164
	Over the River	SSAAB	4	88
Dominick DiOrio	Walking to the Sun	SATB	4	149
Stacy Garrop	The Want of Peace	SATB	4	160
Paul Halley	What Stood Will Stand	SATB	4	123
Andrew Maxfield	The Clearing Rests	SATB	4	90
	The Seed is in the Ground	SATB	4	121
	Whatever is Foreseen in Joy	SATB	4	129
	The Little Stream Sings	SATB	4	151
	Prayer After Eating	SATB	4	166
J. David Moore	Come, Let Us Meet Here Together	SATB	4	53
J. David Moore	To Know the Dark	SATB	4	93
John Newell	The Wild Geese	SATB	4	66
Philip Orem	Absalom, Absalom	SATB	4	131
Joan Szymko	Look Out	SATB	4	94
Gwyneth Walker	The Timbered Choir	SATB	4	61
Giselle Wyers	I Go Among Trees	SATB	4	47
	The Dark Around Us, Come	SATB	4	52
	Within the Circles of Our Lives	SSATB	4	73
Jenni Brandon	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	5	33
Michael Conley	The Peace of Wild Things	SSAATTBB	5	36

Libby Larsen	Within the Circles of Our Lives	SATB	5	75
Andrew Maxfield	Here Where the World Is Being...	SATB	5	99
	A Gracious Sabbath Stood Here	SATB	5	101
	To Sit and Look at Light-Filled...	SATB	5	109
	And When We Speak Together...	SATB	5	137
J. David Moore	Remembering That It Happened...	SATB	5	105
John Newell	The Peace of Wild Things	SATB	5	31
	I Go Among Trees	SATB	5	48
	Slowly, Slowly They Return	SATB	5	59
	The Winter Wren Is Back	SATB	5	125
David Evan Thomas	A Timbered Choir	SSAATTBB	5	63
Aaron Jay Kernis	Circles of Our Lives	SSAATTBB	6	
	The Wheel	SSAATTBB	6	
	In Rain	SSAATTBB	6	
	Returning	SSAATTBB	6	
Olli Kortekangas	The Way to the Woods	SSAATTBB	6	119

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