

Review of Hymn-Based Compositions

Sharon L Beckstead

All prices in U.S. dollars.

New Music

Three Holy Days

Michael Burkhardt. SATB, *a cappella*. Augsburg, 978-1-5064-1400-3, 2016. \$1.50.

Michael Burkhardt has masterfully arranged this excellent text by Delores Dufner, OSB with the tune KEDRON.

There's a sparseness in the opening unison that leads to a drum-like pedal point in the bass and alto sections. All this seems to invoke the prairies where "the mystr'ry hid is here revealed." This anthem is a miniature gem in 25 bars for Holy Week.

We Shall Overcome

Tom Trenney. SATB and percussion. St Olaf Choral Series, Augsburg Fortress, 978-1-5064-1401-0, 2016. \$1.80.

A large choir is required for performance as there are sections for four-part women's and men's choirs, although there is doubling of parts which will aid the smaller choir. The djembe part will greatly add to this performance and ground it to the roots. This is a well-crafted arrangement of an American favorite.

Born in the Night, Mary's Child

Text and tune by Geoffrey Ainger, arr. Hal H. Hopson. SATB, piano, opt. C instrument. Glad Song, Augsburg Fortress, 978-1-5064-1382-2, 2016. \$1.80.

Hopson's arrangement has captured this hauntingly beautiful melody. Solo voices or sections begin, leading to a duet middle section, and closing with four-part harmony. The optional instrument further adds to the musicality of this selection. As we have come to expect and admire, Hal Hopson does not disappoint. A wonderful choice for your Christmas carol service.

I Sing the Birth – A Hymn on the Nativity of My Savior

Donald Livingston. SATB, harp or piano, opt. viola. Augsburg 978-1-5064-1391-4, 2016. \$1.95.

This is a more challenging anthem with excellent part-writing and word-painting on a text by Ben Johnson (1572-1637). It would really benefit from having a harp play the accompaniment. The viola part, while optional, is a colorful addition.

Gathered Chosen, God's Creation

Andrew Birling. SATB, organ, C instrument, opt. assembly. Augsburg 978-1-5064-1387-7, 2016. \$1.95.

This is a sturdy presentation of the tune OMNI DEI. Solo sections begin with the women, answering the men.

Wonderful text painting in the *a capella* verses two and three. Verse four could be presented with the organ accompaniment and the assembly can join in the final verse "Blessed and strengthened for the journey." This was written for Paul Westemeyer and the Master of Sacred Music alumni of Luther Seminary. An excellent text and composition which can be used for communion, ordination, or other celebrations.

(cont.)

I Look to Thee in Every Need

Scott Perkins. SATB, piano, opt. assembly. Augsburg 978-1-5064-1390-7, 2016. \$1.95.

Samuel Longfellow's excellent text has been paired with a newly composed tune LEGAMENTUM by Scott Perkins. The assembly sings verses one and four while the choir sing the middle two verses. The writing is sparse at times and very lush at others, always supporting the text. The difficult piano part is integral to the piece much in the way of Schubert lieder—one needs the other to be complete.

The Final Harvest

Jonathan Strommen Campbell. SATB, piano, 2 violins. Augsburg 978-1-5064-1397-6, 2016. \$1.95.

A favorite hymn for the harvest season, "Come, ye thankful people, come," is presented in this challenging anthem. The string parts are integral to the arrangement and the piano accompaniment becomes quite tricky with lots of bell-like effects. The "alleluia" ending builds in intensity and surprisingly ends with a quiet "amen." Written in memory of John Hatling (1955-2014), one can feel some of the sympathy that this was his final harvest.

On This Day Earth Shall Ring

Arr. Bryan L. Greer. SATB, organ, opt. piano and handbells. Augsburg 978-1-5064-1395-2, 2016. \$2.40.

A favorite Christmas hymn is arranged as a dance with a ritornello on the organ between stanzas. The organ accompaniment presents some challenging syncopations while the choral parts have some echo writing. Handbells come in at the end for a rousing climax.

Nine American Folk Hymns

Arr. Robert Lehman. SATB *a cappella*. Paraclete Press, PPM01613, 2016, \$7.50

Minor tone painting is found in "Alas, and did my Savior bleed." Two-part duet writing leads to lush four-part writing and an echo ending "fall at his feet" in "Come away to the skies." The tenors have the melody in the middle of "Come, thou fount of every blessing" and are surrounded by the alto and bass parts. Crunchy harmonies are found in "Did Christ the great example lead." Framed by a solo voice, the middle section of "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" is very lush. "Hallelujahs" build throughout "I know that my redeemer lives" and culminate with challenging syncopation. "Through all the world below" is a lush setting of the tune GREEN MEADOWS. Building from a single voice to four with variations helps paint the text "When I can read my title clear." WONDROUS LOVE is well crafted with echoes and solo lines. All of these selections remind one of the polyphony of earlier times but with a present day twist.

Sharon L. Beckstead is a Past President of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. Currently she serves as Music Director at Leaside United Church in Toronto, Ontario, and is a member of the Board of Directors for the Orpheus Choir. In addition to her church duties, Sharon has taught piano and organ privately and currently is Manager - Member Services /Administrative Assistant for the Canadian Snowbird Association. Sharon has appeared in recitals and hymn festivals in Germany, the United States and across Canada.