

## **Hymn-based Compositions**

Reviewed by David Jaronowski

All prices in U. S. dollars

### **O Laughing Light**

Text by Sylvia G. Dunstan, music by David Sims. SAB, organ. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-4514-9892-9, 2015. \$1.80.

Quality SAB music is in demand but often difficult to find. Sims delivers an admirable product with this piece. With a text penned by Sylvia G. Dunstan that is based upon the ancient hymn *Phos Hilaron*, this anthem will find a home in services commemorating Epiphany, the Transfiguration, or any other time that themes of light and darkness are present in the liturgy. The accompaniment demands a good organist, but the choral parts will be easily mastered by most volunteer choirs, with the beginning and end of the anthem scored in unison.

### **In Sweet Rejoicing**

Text translated by J. William Greene from original *In Dulci Jubilo*, music arr. J. William Greene. SA or SAB or SATB, organ. Paraclete Press PPM01533, 2015. \$2.90.

This anthem is an extremely versatile and useful arrangement of the hymn IN DULCI JUBILO. A peaceful, flowing organ accompaniment blends with very simple, yet beautiful vocal harmonies to create a fresh arrangement of this Christmas classic. Greene has deliberately scored the anthem so that it can be successfully performed with only SA voices, SAB voices, or a full SATB choir. Harmonies in the women's voices are often in thirds and will be accessible to even choirs with the most modest of vocal resources. A few occasions of mild dissonances will create a small challenge, as will the final soprano descant; these are well worth the effort. A good organist is a must due to a busy organ part.

### **Away in a Manger**

Arr. Andrew E. Clarkson. SATB *a cappella*. Paraclete Press PPM01517, 2015. \$.90.

This setting of the traditional carol is straightforward and uncomplicated. Clarkson avoids a traditional harmonization throughout, with voice-leading that is not difficult to follow but could result in tuning difficulties for more amateur choirs. The final verse is set with SATB voices and a soprano descant singing a neutral syllable. Although not an involved piece, a choir of sufficient resources and ability is needed. This piece will be a welcome addition to more polished choirs looking for a fresh setting of an old Christmas favorite.

### **Canticle of the Turning**

Text and music by Rory Cooney, arr. Anne Krentz Organ. SATB, piano, flute, oboe, cello, opt. congregation. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-4514-9877-6. \$2.25.

Anne Krentz Organ has taken Rory Cooney's well known paraphrase of the *Magnificat* and has returned it to its Irish roots. From the lilting piano accompaniment that stresses strong beats to the flute and oboe parts weaving around it, everything about this arrangement calls to mind the original Irish folk-song upon which the song is based. Neither the vocal parts nor the piano accompaniment are difficult. The choral writing is intuitive and just about any SATB choir would have no difficulty learning the parts. This arrangement would work particularly well with a congregation already used to singing the hymn; in that situation it would serve as a welcome elaboration to the standard keyboard part found in the GIA hymnal accompaniment books.

### **In the Bleak Midwinter**

Arr. Cynthia Dobrinski. 3-5 octave handbells. Agape/Hope Publishing #2732, 2015. \$4.50.

Dobrinski's arrangement of this Christmas favorite is a gem not to be missed. A dramatic introduction is followed by a statement of the hymn tune. The subsequent verse is treated as a variation on the hymn tune, much in the manner of an organ prelude. This gives way to a simple and elegant coda. Though not intricate, this piece requires musicians who are good readers since there is some syncopation present. In churches or schools with a handbell ensemble, this arrangement is likely to become a favorite and a staple of the Christmas season.

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