

Reviews of Hymn-Based Choral Compositions

Jane Best

(All prices are in U.S. dollars.)

New Music

Our Comforter and Guide. Daniel C. Meyer. GIA, 2013, G-8415. \$1.90. Piano and 4-part equal voices.

This beautiful four-part accompanied canon is part of GIA's *Not for Children Only* series, and I can see many possibilities for using it, including general worship, the opening of Sunday School, Pentecost, and Confirmation. I am taken with the possibility of starting with a group of children, whether choir or Sunday School, and supporting their singing with adult voices, including them in the greater harmony. We are told the music is an early North American hymn tune, and although the tune has not been identified, it has that open, shape-note sound. The text is drawn from two sources, "The Holy Spirit, heav'nly Dove" by Isaac Watts, and "We are not left to walk alone" by Mary Jane Walker. The two simple verses are stated once in unison before the canon begins, closing with the unison phrase, "Our Guide, the Holy Spirit." Easily memorised.

Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth. Arranged by Tom Trenney. Augsburg Fortress, 2014, \$1.80. SATB and piano.

A carefully-crafted text in modern language written by Jean Janzen and based on Julian of Norwich, this hymn mentions each person of the Trinity and so could be useful for Trinity Sunday, for baptisms, dedications, or confirmations, or even for Mother's Day. This choral setting is based on the tune MARYTON and feels familiar enough to allow a congregation to relax and truly listen to the words. Opening with delicate piano and treble voices, it soon grows in complexity when the rest of the choir sings. The final verse is an SATB harmonization which quiets back down to mystery at the end.

Walk in Peace. Adam M. L. Tice and Sally Ann Morris. GIA, G-8589. Collection of 14 anthems for choir, keyboard, and various instruments. \$18.50 for collection; anthems also available individually.

These anthems provide an excellent means of introducing a congregation to Adam Tice's well-considered words and Sally Ann Morris's cheerful music. There is great flexibility built into these songs, frequently contrasting unison/solo voice with choral portions which would be easy to learn in a short time for a choir with limited rehearsal time or perhaps a large project on the go. The keyboard parts are interesting and supportive, and could be played by someone with intermediate piano skills, even with their often-syncopated rhythms. Many of the songs have additional instrument parts, to include folk in your congregation who are not in the choir: guitar, electric guitar, and tenor saxophone are each featured, as well as several parts written for C instrument, so you could recruit a flautist or even a good recorder player. There is even a *cappella* singing in this collection.

“When You Wonder, When You Wander” weaves in and out of modal harmonies, first with solo voice and then a duet. The accompaniment reinforces the syncopated rhythm and would also help amateur singers to find the altered notes without being obvious. The piece resolves to the major mode to end with “and anywhere you may go, you are God’s child” (\$2.05). “What is the World Like” (when God’s will is done?) begins with a solo accompanied by piano and optional C instrument, continues with various unison sections, and closes with an SATB setting with lovely soft dissonances, which could also be enjoyed *a cappella* (\$1.90). “Walk in Peace” is a brief but challenging cumulative song with keyboard accompaniment. Scored for three equal parts, the first voice sings an 8-measure phrase, then is joined by another part with a different melodic and rhythmic pattern, and finally a third separate part is added. The harmonies are complex, and once the choir is comfortable with the moves to the flat side, the sound will be very rewarding. This song and its companion, “Upon This Path,” are published under one cover (\$1.90). “Will Morning Never Come?” has a Latin beat and a solo feel, with SA(div.) voices acting as backup singers during the second half. The song moves from lament to hope, and the electric guitar part (written out in full) is not an add-on but completes the mood throughout.

This collection of very singable anthems also has a companion CD (\$16.95) which would make a good gift on its own. The cover of the collection and the CD sets the mood with a picture of a smooth path through a spacious woodland, and the peaceful feeling continues throughout the CD; although with challenging texts along with many changes of tempo, style and instrumentation, this music pushes us not to stop but to walk further with God. And a boon for the choir director, each title is also available as a separately downloadable mp3 (\$1.29) so choir members could purchase the recording and practice at home.

One of My “Old” Favorites

My Shepherd Will Supply My Need. Hal Hopson. Kelman Hall Publishing 02/2029, 2002. \$1.95. SATB and keyboard.

Based on Isaac Watts’ paraphrase of *Psalm 23*, and the well-loved tune RESIGNATION from Walker’s *Southern Harmony*, this anthem begins with a soloist accompanied by treble voices. A two-part canon follows, and then the anthem builds to a mixed SATB stanza, closing with the soloist again accompanied by two-part trebles. Throughout the piece, the keyboard is restrained and subtle and often drops out, but one could double the choir parts gently if tuning is an issue. I first sang this piece during a session of the Summer Institute of Church Music, and have used it with volunteer singers here in the rural North several times since.

Jane Best is the director of the Manitoulin Community Choir and one of the worship leaders of the Island Community Church. She teaches piano and other instruments, and is a composer with anthems published by Kelman Hall Publishing and Cypress Choral Music. Several of her hymns may be found in various collections. In 2013, Wayne Leupold Editions Inc. published *Flowing Spirit*, a small volume of her hymns.