



NICHOLAS RILEY HOLLOWAY (B.2001)

AS THE DAYS GO BY

A COLLECTION OF 3 ORIGINAL CHORAL WORKS
EXPLORING THEMES OF TIME AND MEMORY



A huge thanks to my honors committee

Primary advisor: Prof. Eric Nathan

Secondary reader: Prof. Wang Lu

COVER ART

(Top) Claude Monet, *Spring in Giverny*, 1890

(Bottom) Claude Monet, *La route de Vétheuil, effet de neige*, 1879

I. I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming)

FOR SSAATB AND SOLOISTS

WORDS BY CHARLOTTE MEW (1869 - 1928) AND
ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON (1809 - 1892)



II. Who has seen the Wind

FOR SATB

POEM BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830 - 1894)



III. A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky

FOR SATB

ACROSTIC BY LEWIS CARROLL (1832 - 1898)

NOTE

All of the works used are within the Public Domain

“I SO LIKED SPRING”

I so liked Spring last year
Because you were here; -
The thrushes too -
Because it was these you so liked to hear -
I so liked you.

This year's a different thing, -
I'll not think of you.
But I'll like the Spring because it is simply Spring
As the thrushes do.

~ *Charlotte Mew*

“THE THROSTLE”*

‘Summer is coming, summer is coming.
I know it, I know it, I know it.
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,’
Yes, my wild little poet.

Sing the new year in under the blue.
Last year you sang it as gladly.
‘New, new, new, new’! Is it then so new
That you should carol so madly?

‘Love again, song again, nest again, young again,’
Never a prophet so crazy!
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,
See, there is hardly a daisy.

‘Here again, here, here, here, happy year’!
O warble unchidden, unbidden!
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear.
And all the winters are hidden.

~ *Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

** only lines 1-4, 5 and 15 are used within
the choral setting*

“WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND”?

Who has seen the wind?

Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

~ *Cristina Rossetti*

“A BOAT BENEATH A SUNNY SKY”

A boat beneath a sunny sky,
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July -

Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear -

Long has faded that sunny sky:
Echoes fade and memories die:
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream -
Lingering in the golden gleam -
Life, what is it but a dream?

~ *Lewis Carroll*

I. I SO LIKED SPRING (SUMMER IS COMING)

Charlotte Mew (1869 - 1928) was an English writer and feminist. Her childhood was tragic: of seven children, 3 died and 2 were institutionalized, leaving only Mew and her sister Anne - themes of death, mental illness, and loneliness would permeate much of Mew's short stories and poetry. Her first short story was published in 1894 in the *Yellow Book*, a journal considered racy in content. Most of Mew's poetry was written in the 1910's and was collected in *The Farmer's Bride* (1914), *Saturday Market* (1921), and *The Rambling Sailor* (1929). "**I so liked Spring**" was likely published posthumously, and has seen relatively few musical settings, and seemingly none for choir.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 - 1892) was an English poet, often regarded as one of the most influential of the Victorian age. From a young age, Tennyson showed a talent for writing, though his teenage years were difficult due to his father's mental state and alcoholism. In 1827, Tennyson began attending Trinity College in Cambridge and joined an undergraduate literary club called "the Apostles," where he met his soon-to-be best friend, Arthur Hallam, who unexpectedly passed in 1833, affecting Tennyson greatly. In 1830, Tennyson published his first independent collection, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, and by 1850, after publishing his critically acclaimed collection *Poems* in 1842, Tennyson became one of Britain's most popular poets with the publication of "In Memoriam." "**The Throstle**" (a term referring to the song thrush) was first published in 1889, after Tennyson's death, and has seen almost no musical setting.

"**I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming)**" opens the collection with a reflection on times passed and an affirmation that the coming days will be different. 2 soloists, a soprano and mezzo-soprano, begin the piece by trading material. The mezzo, playing the part of the narrator in Mew's poem, recalls that the previous spring was enjoyable, if only because of the presence of someone else. The soprano interjects with birdsong-like, and metrically contrasting material, "Summer is coming! Summer is coming! I know it!"

Over the course of the setting (and Mew's poem), the narrator, characterized by the slower-moving melodic material, comes to terms with the change, and eventually exclaims that she will "like the Spring because it is simply Spring / As the thrushes do." In the end, she too takes up the thrushes song: "Summer is coming, my dear." The seasons represented here (spring and summer) can be otherwise understood as stand-ins for new beginnings and better days, both for the sake of narrative and for the listener who needs to hear it.

II. WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

Christina Rossetti (1830 - 1894) was an English poet, well-known for her work in fantasy, children's, and religious writing, and daughter of the Italian poet Gabriele Rossetti. Christina Rossetti began writing poetry at a very young age, and had her first works printed by her grandfather in the early 1840s. Her teenage years were fraught with mental and physical illness, and during this time, she, along with her mother and sister, turned to the Anglo-Catholic movement of the Church of England: her devotion continued until her death and influenced much of her work. In 1862, Rossetti published her first public poetry collection (that was written under her own name), *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, which was very well-received. Before passing of cancer in 1894, she published a number of other works, including the well-known "In the Bleak Midwinter," establishing herself as one of the most influential Victorian writers. "**Who Has Seen the Wind?**" was published in 1872 as part of her poetry collection titled *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*. Since its publication, the poem has seen a number of settings, including those for choir.

The setting of "**Who Has Seen the Wind?**" comes second in the program as, fittingly, a passing piece. In this poem, the narrator poses the question of who has seen the wind, and comes to find that it can only be seen through the passage of time and the movement of the trees. In conceptualizing this piece, I thought about how the wind affects the world around us - a calm breeze that stirs may eventually develop into a gust that sends the trees roaring. Regardless of whether

or not one feels the wind as it passes (perhaps being indoors or wearing a heavy coat), it's often the case that one will *hear* it.

As the piece develops, more and more harmonies are added, as if the voices themselves are being stirred by the wind. This development culminates in 8-part divisi toward the end of the piece before thinning down to 4-part harmonies again. The final motion of the sopranos with a repeat of their earliest motif (though in a different key) suggests a cycle of questioning, discovery, and change. The wind, like time, will never cease, even if its passing is not evident.

III. A BOAT BENEATH A SUNNY SKY

Lewis Carroll (1832 - 1898) is the pseudonym for Charles Dodgson, an English writer and poet, as well as a mathematician, logician, and photographer. At the age of 12, Dodgson began writing for the *Rectory Magazines* of Croft, England, though dedicated most of his time to the study of mathematics and classics. Due to academic success, Dodgson was admitted to a lectureship at Christ Church in 1855, where he met Henry George Liddell, the dean, whose children Charles was asked to entertain. In his lecture rooms or on rowing trips, Dodgson would tell stories to the Liddell children, illustrating as he went on a sheet of paper. "Alice's Adventures Underground," which would become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, began as one of these stories, and Dodgson was tasked with writing down the tale as a gift to Alice Liddell - it was soon after published in 1865. The book was followed by a sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* in 1871. "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky" is part of the epilogue to this esteemed and successful sequel - the poem takes the form of an acrostic, the first letters of each line spelling "Alice Pleasance Liddell," the dedicatee of the story. Being the most well known of the poems thus far, "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky" has seen the most musical settings, including many choral works.

The final piece, "**A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky**," examines the dreamlike state of memory and the ambiguity of time. The narrator, in the midst of recalling a memory, struggles to separate it from the present. "Phantomwise," the memory

of Alice haunts him, along with the Wonderland he created. The narrative is itself also rather ambiguous, neither positive or negative, and intentionally complicated further musically, leaning in to the idea of memory, time, and emotion as a dream, ending without a real cadence.

On it's own, the piece is rather grim, especially compared to the settings before it, but when considered as part of the entire collection, it highlights a number of temporal cycles that have been hinted in the other works. Because this final setting ties the short collection together, the title, *As the Days Go By*, is taken from Carroll's acrostic.

AS THE DAYS GO BY, THE COLLECTION

As the Days Go By is a collection of original choral compositions exploring themes of time and memory. In addition to representing these themes, the collection serves to highlight a number of narrative cycles, speaking to the continuous progress of time and the possibility of hope and better days.

The first of these can be found in reference to the seasons. The collection begins with "I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming)," which, as the title suggests, takes place in Spring and anticipates Summer. The second work, "Who Has Seen the Wind?," doesn't directly reference any seasons but instead serves to highlight the passage of time. Finally, in "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky," the narrator remarks that "Autumn frosts have slain July," speaking to the beginning of Autumn and suggesting the coming of Winter. Thus the cycle of the seasons is completed, and though the frosts of Autumn and Winter are on the mind of the narrator, Spring is an inevitable follower.

Another example of cyclical momentum can be found in the narrative voice, which can be seen as continuous throughout the collection. Beginning in "I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming)," the narrator reflects on the absence of someone or something from their life, though overcomes the feeling and looks forward to better days. In "Who Has Seen the Wind?," the narrator can be understood to question the passage of time, and finally, in "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky," the narrator further contemplates their memory and life, and finds

themselves haunted by their past, their dreams, and someone or something they lost (in this reading, the same thing they recalled in the first piece, “I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming)”). The understanding of this narrative as a cycle reinforces the themes of the collection - time continually marches on, though better days lie ahead.

BACKGROUND AND THE COMPOSITION PROCESS

One and a half years ago, I composed my first choral pieces - a collection of settings for the lines 1-5 of St. Francis’ “Canticle of the Sun” - for the final project in a religious studies class. Looking back, these pieces are generally incomplete and underwhelming by my present standards, but I enjoyed the process so much that I immediately set about writing another, this time setting a poem by the recommendation of a friend, Edgar Allan Poe’s “Annabel Lee,” over the course of Winter Break. Coincidentally, the Brown Chorus, which I am a part of, was performing a program titled *Songs of the Sea* the following semester, and needed an additional 6 to 8 minute piece. My setting of “Annabel Lee” fit within the theme of the concert as well as the necessary length, and I was extremely fortunate to see it come together over a few months and be performed in a public concert.

Since then, most of my composition work has been vocal work, particularly works for choir. I thought, then, that it would be fitting for my honors project to explore this newfound medium, and decided to compose a collection of three choral settings based on poems with similar themes.

I unknowingly began work on the collection almost a year ago with “I so liked Spring (Summer is Coming),” composed during the final months of my sixth semester, combining works by Charlotte Mew and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Once finished (or what I thought was finished at the time), I set it aside and essentially forgot that it existed, until I came across it again while looking for an additional piece. Seeing that it was thematically compatible, I updated the work and decided to include it in the project.

Shortly before the beginning of my penultimate semester, I began work on two pieces that I meant to include in the collection: “A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky,” which is part of the final product, and “Dirge in Woods,” based on a poem of the

same name by George Meredith (1828 - 1909). While promising, the piece just wasn't ready for composition, though I mean to return to it at a later date. For "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky," the composition went fairly smoothly: the initial motive became clear to me, as it does with most poetic settings, as soon as I read the first line. From there, it felt like a natural development, without too much frustration, luckily.

The final piece I decided to set came about by accident - in my frustration working on "Dirge in Woods," I began work on a setting for Christina Rossetti's "Who Has Seen the Wind?" as something of a compositional exercise to shake some ideas loose. To my surprise, it became something much more, and overtook "Dirge in Woods" as an intended work for the collection. Like "A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky," the composition went rather smoothly, save for a small snag due to using all of the poetic material. Once I pushed through that, it was smooth sailing.

Overall, the composition process was draining and difficult, if only for the time I spent stressing about how I would make the collection come together. While partly intentional, the level to which the pieces relate to each other now was unexpected. Other aspects, such as the common time period of the writers, or the start and ending keys of the collection coinciding, was entirely accidental. This entire project was a thrill to work on, with its ups and downs, and the way everything has come together in the end only further reinforces what this collection means to say -

Better days are ahead. It's only a matter of time. Everything will turn out in the end.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

It has been a pleasure working with and learning
from all I've had the privilege to meet.

Nicholas Riley Holloway, 2024