

LIBBY LARSEN

ALASKA SPRING

for SATB Chorus and String Quartet

on the poetry of Tom Sexton

KENWOOD EDITIONS

Libby Larsen

ALASKA SPRING
for SATB Chorus and String Quartet

Commissioned by the Alaska Chamber Singers, David Hagen, conductor,
in commemoration of their 25th Anniversary Season

Premiered April 21, 2012 by the Alaska Chamber Singers, Anton Armstrong, conductor,
at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Anchorage, AK

Duration: 10:30 minutes

PROGRAM NOTE

David Hagen, director of the Alaska Chamber Singers, contacted me with the idea to commission a work for their 25th Anniversary concert. I was delighted and we set about discussing possible texts. David suggested that I look at the poetry of Tom Sexton, Poet Laureate of Alaska. Being a child of the North Country myself, I resonated deeply with his imagery—still, frozen ground, tender spring plants spiraling towards the light, ravens, juncos, hares, mastodons, trumpeter swans, bears, snowy owls, hummingbirds, ladyslippers, fiddlehead ferns, lichen, insects in bark—hardy and delicate messengers of what has been survived and what is to come, always in the cycles of time and nature. Their message is of hope and persistence in the midst of adversity.

I chose five poems from his volume *For the Sake of the Light: New and Selected Poems*: “April,” “Extending the Range,” “Fiddlehead,” “Juncos,” and “Walking the Marsh.” Each poem has its own distinct character, yet the five poems are intertwined through their shared imagery of nature in the grip of northern cold.

~Libby Larsen

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ALASKA SPRING

for SATB Chorus and String Quartet

I. April

Another almost snow-
less winter, the stunned
earth unable to shed
its skin, when
a hushed sound
wakes you from
your restless sleep,
the first warm wind
of the new year,
frost rising
from the ground
lifting its coffin
as it goes,
leaving its seed
in the iris, so
this is what it means
to be holy, so
this is what it means
to be saved.

II. Extending the Range

The ravens have departed taking hooded
winter in their wake.
Hares darken. Ferns spiral toward the light.
Muskeg spades the air.
After long seasons of burlap and manure,
our red honeysuckle opens in the yard
where I wait for hummingbirds to descend
their small wings wild with desire.

III. Fiddlehead

Above the still frozen ground
a thin sheath of brown
covering a tight spiral of green:
fiddlehead, or lady
fern, to be sautéed with a pinch
of salt and pepper.
When I kneel to harvest them
with my knife,
I feel the last of winter's cold
rising from the ground
and I am lost in this small pleasure
nothing can contain.

IV. Juncos

They're the first
sparrows
to return north
before
spring's halting
green. I watch
one hopping
from bare branch
to bare
ground: its song
is like the
sound of
a telegraph key:
dit...dit...dit...
insects...in...
bark...dit...
dit...dit...
stop.

V. Walking the Marsh

I have followed the flight of a trumpeter swan.
I have looked through a window of ice.
I have picked crowberries blacker than coal.
I have touched lichen on a caribou's skull.
I have seen a hare with one white leg.
I have seen a lady's slipper wet with dew.
I have watched a snowy owl rise at dusk.
I have placed my hand in the print of a bear.
I have walked where mastodons walked.
I have fallen in love with the world.

ALASKA SPRING

I. APRIL

TOM SEXTON

LIBBY LARSEN

Seamless, frozen to fluid (♩ = 52-56)

p

S An - oth - er al - most snow - less win - ter, the

A An - oth - er al - most snow - less win - ter, the

T An - oth - er al - most snow - less win - ter, the

B An - oth - er al - most snow - less win - ter, the

pp
ped.

The first system of the musical score is for the vocal quartet and piano accompaniment. It consists of five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano. The vocal parts are in 6/4 time and feature a melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment is in 6/4 time and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and pianissimo (*pp*), with a pedaling instruction (*ped.*) at the end of the system.

4

S stunned earth un - a - ble to shed its skin,

A stunned earth un - a - ble to shed its skin,

T stunned earth un - a - ble to shed its skin,

B stunned earth un - a - ble to shed its skin,

pp *pp*
ped. *ped.*

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal quartet and piano accompaniment. It consists of five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano. The vocal parts continue the melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment continues with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include pianissimo (*pp*) and pedaling instructions (*ped.*) at the end of the system.

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poco a poco accelerando

S *p* Ah

A *p* Ah

T *p* Ah

B

mp *very lightly* *poco a poco cresc.*

$\text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{♩} = \text{c. } 126$

10

S *mf* Ah when a hushed sound

A *mf* Ah when a hushed sound

T *mf* when a hushed sound

B *p* Ah when a hushed sound

mf

14

S
wakes you from your rest-less sleep, the

A
wakes you from your rest-less sleep, the first warm wind

T
wakes you from your rest-less sleep, the

B
wakes you from your rest-less sleep, the first warm wind

mf

mf

mf

mp

warmly

18

S
first warm wind of the new year, frost ris-ing from the

A
of the new year, frost ris-ing from the

T
first warm wind of the new year, frost ris-ing from the

B
of the new year, frost ris-ing from the

sub.mf

mf

sub.mf

sub.mf

mf

sub.mf

sub.mf

sub.mf

21

S ground lift - ing its cof - fin as it *mf*

A ground lift - ing its cof - fin *mf*

T ground lift - ing its cof - fin as it *mf*

B ground lift - ing its cof - fin *sub.mf*

24

S goes, leav - ing its seed in the i - ris,

A leav - ing its seed in the i - ris,

T goes, leav - ing its seed in the i - ris,

B leav - ing its seed in the i - ris,

ritard. **Broadly**

f *short* *tutti* *long* *mp*

S
so this is what it means to be ho - ly, so

A
so this is what it means to be ho - ly, so

T
so this is what it means to be ho - ly, so

B
so this is what it means ho - ly, so

ffp *long*

31 $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 126$ **rit.**

S
this is what it means to be saved.

A
this is what it means to be saved.

T
this is what it means to be saved.

B
this is what it means to be saved.

delicately
pp

ped. to end

II. EXTENDING THE RANGE

(♩ = 80-88) *mf*

S The ra-vens, the ra-vens have de-part-ed

A The ra-vens, the ra-vens have de-part-ed

T The ra-vens, the ra-vens have de-part-ed

B The ra - vens, the ra-vens have de-part-ed

f *pp* *f*

5 *quietly, relaxed, slower* *mf*

S tak-ing hood - ed win-ter in their wake. Hares dark-en.

A in their wake. Hares dark-en.

T *quietly, relaxed, slower* *mf* tak-ing hood - ed win-ter in their wake. Hares dark-en.

B in their wake.

sub.p *f* *mp*

accel.

rit.

11

S *mf* ————— *f*
spi-ral toward the light.

A *mf* ————— *f*
spi-ral toward the light.

T *mf* ————— *f*
spi-ral toward the light.

B *mf* ————— *f*
Ferns spi-ral toward the light.

p ————— *f*

relaxed

Tempo I (♩ = 80-88)

13

S *mf* ————— *short* //
Mus-keg spades the air.

A *mf* ————— *short* //
Mus-keg spades the air.

T *mf* ————— *short* // *mf*
Mus - keg spades the air. Af - ter long

B *mf* ————— *short* // *mf*
Mus - keg spades the air. long ———

sub.mp ————— *mf*

S *mf* our— red hon-ey-suck-le o-pens in the

A *mf* our— red hon-ey-suck-le o-pens in the

T sea-sons of bur-lap and ma-nure, our— red hon-ey-suck-le o-pens in the

B sea-sons of bur-lap and ma-nure, our— red hon-ey-suck-le o-pens in the

sub.p

S *p* yard where I wait,

A *p* yard where I wait, where I wait,

T *p* yard where I wait, where I

B *sub.p* yard where I wait, where I wait,

f p

3

S
where I wait _____ for hum-ming-birds to de-scent _____ their

A
_____ where I wait _____ hum-ming-birds their

T
wait, _____ *p* hum-ming-birds _____ their

B
_____ where I wait, _____ I wait _____ their

S
small wings wild _____

A
small wings wild _____ with de-sire, _____

T
tutti small wings wild _____ with de -

B
small wings wild _____ with de-sire, _____

S *p* with de - sire, *mf* with de - sire,

A *mf* with de - sire,

T sire, *mf* with de - sire,

B *mf* with de - sire, with de -

S *mp* with de - sire.

A *mp* with de - sire, de - sire.

T *mp* with de - sire, de - sire.

B *mp* sire, de - sire, de - sire.

III. FIDDLEHEAD

fluid, flexible, gospel shaping

S *mf* *p* *mf*
 A-bove the still fro-zen ground— a thin sheathe of brown cov-er-ing a tight

A *mf* *p* *mf*
 A-bove the still fro-zen ground— a thin sheathe of brown cov-er-ing a tight

T *mf* *p* *mf*
 A-bove the still fro-zen ground— a thin sheathe of brown cov-er-ing a tight

B *mf* *p* *mf*
 A-bove the still fro-zen ground— a thin sheathe of brown cov-er-ing a tight

S *p* *mf*
 spi-ral of green: fid-dle-head, or la-dy fern,— of salt and pep-per.

A *p* *sub. mf*
 spi-ral of green: fid-dle-head, or la-dy fern,— to be sau-téed with a pinch of salt and pep-per.

T *p* *mf*
 spi-ral of green: fid-dle-head, or la-dy fern,— of salt and pep-per.

B *p* *mf*
 spi-ral of green: fid-dle-head, or la-dy fern,— of salt and pep-per.

S *f* When I kneel _____ to har-vest them with my knife, *sub.p* I feel _____ the last of win-ter's

A *f* When I kneel _____ to har-vest them with my knife, *gl.* *sub.p* I feel _____ the last of win-ter's

T *f* When I kneel _____ to har-vest them with my knife, *sub.p* I feel _____ the last of win-ter's

B *f* *gl.* When I kneel _____ to har-vest them with my knife, *tutti* *sub.p* I feel _____ the last of win-ter's

S cold ris-ing from the ground and I am lost _____ in this small pleas-ure noth-ing can con-tain.

A cold ris-ing from the ground and I am lost _____ in this small pleas-ure noth-ing can con-tain.

T cold ris-ing from the ground and I am lost _____ in this small pleas-ure noth-ing can con-tain.

B cold ris-ing from the ground and I am lost _____ in this small— pleas-ure noth-ing can con-tain.

IV. JUNCOS

Small bird tempo (♩ = 156-160 ish)

Piano introduction for 'IV. JUNCOS'. The piece begins in 3/4 time, then changes to 4/4, and returns to 3/4. The right hand features chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a rhythmic eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano).

Piano accompaniment for measures 6-10. The right hand continues with chords and single notes, while the left hand maintains a rhythmic eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *p* (piano).

Vocal staves for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: "They're the first spar-rows to re-turn north be-fore spring's halt-ing". The music is in 4/4 time, with key changes to 6/4 and 5/4. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte).

Piano accompaniment for measures 11-15. The right hand features chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a rhythmic eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte).

S
green.

A
green.

T
green.

B
green.

sub. mf

20

S
mf
I — watch one hop - ping from

A
mf
I watch one hop - ping from

T
mf
I watch one hop - ping from

B
mf
I watch one hop - ping from

mp

26

S bare branch to bare ground: its song is like the

A bare branch to bare ground: its song is like the

T bare branch to bare ground: its song is like the

B bare branch to bare ground: its song is like the

32

molto rit. a tempo *f* **Suddenly slow** *p*

S sound of a tel-e-graph key: dit... dit, dit... in-sects... in...

A sound of a tel-e-graph key: dit... dit, dit... in-sects... in...

T sound of a tel-e-graph key: dit... dit, dit... in-sects... in...

B sound of a tel-e-graph key: dit... dit, dit... in-sects... in...

gradually accelerate to the end

37

p gradually crescendo to the end

S bark ... dit, dit ... dit ... dit, dit ... dit ...

A bark ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ...

T bark ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ...

B bark ... dit ... dit ... dit ... dit ...

non vib. *con vib.*

p gradually crescendo to the end

ped.

44

S dit, dit ... dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... stop.

A dit ... dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... stop.

T dit ... dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... stop.

B dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... dit, dit ... stop.

f *f* *f* *f* *f* *f* *f*

V. WALKING THE MARSH

warmly, expressively ♩ = 112 (in two)

mf

Measures 1-4 of the piano introduction. The music is in 3/2 time and features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The dynamic is marked *mf*.

5

p *mf*

Measures 5-8 of the piano introduction. The music continues with the melody and bass line. The dynamic is marked *p* in measure 6 and *mf* in measure 8.

10

mp *mf* *p.* *p.*

Measures 9-14 of the piano introduction. The music continues with the melody and bass line. The dynamics are marked *mp*, *mf*, *p.*, and *p.* in measures 10, 11, 13, and 14 respectively.

15

mf *mf*

T I have fol-lowed the flight of a trum-pet-er swan.

B I have fol-lowed the flight of a trum-pet-er

Measures 15-18 of the vocal introduction. The vocal lines for Tenor (T) and Bass (B) are shown. The Tenor line starts with a melody in measure 15, and the Bass line starts in measure 17. The dynamics are marked *mf* in measure 15 and *mf* in measure 17.

mp *p.* *p.*

Measures 15-18 of the piano accompaniment. The music continues with the melody and bass line. The dynamics are marked *mp*, *p.*, and *p.* in measures 15, 16, and 17 respectively.

mf

S I have looked through a win-dow _____ of ice.

mf

A I have looked through a win - dow _____ of ice.

mf

T I have looked through a win-dow, _____ a win - dow _____ of ice.

B swan. _____ I have looked through a win-dow of ice.

S Ah _____ Ah _____ Ah _____ Ah _____

mp *mf*

A Ah _____ Ah _____ I have touched li - chen on a car - i - bou's skull.

mp

T Ah _____ Ah _____ Ah _____

mf *mp*

B I have picked crow-ber-ries black-er than coal. Ah _____ Ah _____

p

27

mf

S I have seen a la-dy's slip-per wet with dew.

mp

A Ah Ah Ah Ah

mf *mp*

T I have seen a hare with one white leg. Ah Ah

B Ah Ah Ah

mf *mp*

31

mp

S I have watched a snow-y owl

mp

A I have watched a snow-y owl rise

mp

T A snow-y owl rise at dusk,

mp

B I have watched a snow-y owl rise at dusk,

p *mf*

rit.

a tempo

S rise at dusk. I have placed my hand in the print of a bear.

A at dusk. I have placed my hand in the print of a bear.

T at dusk. I have placed my hand in the print of a bear.

B rise at dusk. I have placed my hand in the print of a bear. I have

f

mf

f

tr

mf

S I have walked,

A I have walked, I have followed the flight of a trumpet-er

T I have walked,

B walked, I have walked I have walked,

mf

p

41 *mp* *mf*

S I have walked, I have watched a snow-y owl rise at

A swan. I have walked, I have walked,

T I have looked through a win-dow of ice. I have walked,

B I have walked, rise at

44 *mp* *f*

S dusk. I have walked, I have walked, I have walked,

A I have walked, I have walked, I have walked,

T I have walked, I have walked, I have walked, I have walked where

B dusk. I have walked, I have walked, I have walked,

S
A
T
B

f
I have walked where

mast-a- dons walked. I have walked where mast- a- dons walked. I have walked where

f
I have walked where mast - a- dons walked. I have walked where

mp

52

S
A
T
B

f
I have walked where mast - a- dons walked.

mast - a- dons walked. I have walked where mast - a- dons walked.

mast - a- dons walked. I have walked where mast - a- dons walked.

mast - a- dons walked. I have walked where mast - a- dons walked.

f

55

S I have walked where mast - a - dons walked. Ah

A I have walked where mast - a - dons walked. Ah

T I have walked where mast - a - dons walked. Ah

B I have walked where mast - a - dons walked. Ah

sub.p cresc.

sub.p cresc.

sub.p cresc.

sub.p cresc.

sub.p cresc.

**p. p. p. p.*

58

S Ah Ah Ah **ff**

A Ah Ah Ah **ff**

T Ah Ah Ah **ff** **f** I have fal - len in

B Ah Ah Ah **ff**

molto rit. **a tempo**

ff **f**

**p. p. p. p.*

* grace note ahead of the beat

S *f* I have fal - len in love,

A *f* I have fal - len in love,

T love,

B *f* I have fal - len in

broadly

a tempo

rit.

S I have fal - len in love with the world.

A I have fal - len in love with the world.

T I have fal - len in love with the world.

B love, in love with the world.