

Fall into Winter (2004)

SATB w/ orchestra

Difficulty rating: 2+

Duration: 7'00"

Premiere: Lawrence Philharmonic and Chorus, Lawrence, NY, (L.I.), 02/12/05

Fall into Winter came about after several meetings with Gary Schall, Director of the music program for the Lawrence School District (just over the NYC border in Long Island) and somewhat of a superstar in the music education world. The piece was written for the combined middle school and high school choruses of the district, accompanied by the Lawrence Philharmonic, a community orchestra. Given the text requirements for a secular winter-themed piece with language that would appeal to the older student singers but not be over the heads of the younger ones, I opted to solicit a new text. It was supplied by Washington state poet Sheila Dunlop, who is also the wife of my friend and fellow composer, Reg Unterseher.

The following is adapted from my program notes:

The changing of the seasons has always held a fascination for both Sheila Dunlop, the poet for *Fall into Winter*, and myself. I wanted a winter-themed text that would provide a “darkness-into-light” framework for the music. But there are enough descriptions of the gloomy chill of winter emerging into the warm light of spring, so we tried something different. The poem begins a familiar journey from autumn’s melancholy shower of leaves through the first ominous shivers of winter. But the mood soon changes, and winter becomes, rather, a time of brilliant moonlight on the snow, and families telling stories around the fireplace.

The work opens with spare textures and plaintive woodwinds supporting the work’s main motif, heard in descending imitative lines in the chorus. Gentle chromatic chords form a kind of B section, which emerges into fuller orchestration and the icy beginnings of winter. After a semi-chorus, accompanied by muted brass, paints a fragile scene of sleeping badgers and jumping snow-hares, winter transforms into a benevolent figure. The moon is announced by an altered version of the main motif, scored to the brightest orchestral textures yet in the piece. The orchestra completes the evolution of the originally autumnal first theme and presents it as a long ostinato through the end of the work. Over this, the chorus sings an exuberant counterpoint on the last 3 lines of the text, giving no signs of the desolation usually describing the darkest season.

Scarlet leaves drifting down
Crimson carpet graces the ground
Birds have flown
Fawns have grown
Autumn turns to wear an icy crown.

Frost runes announce the end of fall
Darkness brings a wolf’s lonely call
Badger sleeps
Snow hare leaps
Winter keeps a silent watch on all.

Brilliant moon on shimmering snow
Through the woods a beckoning glow
Warm hearth
Open hearts
Tell the ancient tales of long ago.

--Sheila Dunlop (2004)