

Stabat Mater (2012)

SSATBB a/c

Text: Stabat Mater

Difficulty Rating: 3

Duration: 11-12'

Commissioned by the Carroll University Concert Choir, Music Director Kristina Boerger, as a gift to the people of Todi, Italy, burial place of Frater Jacopone (ca. 1230-1306), author of the Stabat mater dolorosa. Premiered April 2012 in Waukesha, WI; European premiere May 2012 in Todi, Italy.

I set 8 of the 20 verses of the *Stabat mater dolorosa* text. I chose these verses for their focus of intense empathy for the mourning Mother, through which we then experience our own grief at Christ's death and, eventually, glory by his redeeming.

The driving musical force behind my work is the appoggiatura, an accented grace note. I've interpreted it here as a "sighing" figure in somewhat the manner of madrigal tone painting. When used maximally, especially as I've done in verses 2, 5, and 6, it transforms into more of a sob and pierces the texture with profound sorrow. The harmony contributes to this atmosphere of course. One of the most prominent progressions centers around major chords moving by thirds (E major/C major). With added notes, modal borrowing, and inversions, I think major can project doleful at least as well as minor!

I've also made considerable use of silence in the piece, primarily in the introduction, where it underlines the "stunned" stage of mourning. The futility of words is also conveyed in the splitting up of the syllables of individual words among different voice parts. The original plainchant melody, which appears at 5 points during the piece, proceeds here uninterrupted, as a voice from the ether, but the words of the those still on earth are as broken as they themselves are.

A soprano solo presents the 5th and 6th verses, accompanied by "broken" male voices. Following the elaborate textures of much of the piece, it seemed appropriate to close in relative simplicity and sparseness. The arrival at "Christe" at the start of verse 7 is intended to be disarmingly straightforward and tender. While in the last two verses we are indeed heading towards the climax of "paradisi gloria", I wanted to avoid the reflexive option of a grand apotheosis here. The last two words of the piece never rise above *mp* and in fact gradually fade away to *ppp* at the end. The effect aimed for is uplift by way of "lightness", as a balloon drifting up and off into the heavens. Paradise may be glorious but is also a leave-taking.

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Iuxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius

*At the cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last*

Cuius animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransivit gladius

*Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
all his bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword had passed.*

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?

*Is there one who would not weep,
whelmed in miseries so deep
Christ's dear Mother to behold?*

Quis non posset contristari,
Christi Matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio?

*Can the human heart refrain
from partaking in her pain,
in that Mother's pain untold?*

Eia Mater, fons amoris
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lugeam

Fac, ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum
Ut sibi complaceam

Christe, cum sit hinc exire,
Da per Matrem me venire
Ad palmam victoriae

Quando corpus morietur,
Fac, ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria

*O, thou Mother, fount of love,
touch my spirit from above,
make my heart with thine accord.*

*Make me feel as thou has felt;
make my soul to glow and melt
with the love of Christ our Lord.*

*Christ, when thou shalt call me hence,
be Thy mother my defense,
be Thy cross my victory.*

*While my body here decays,
may my soul Thy goodness praise,
safe in Paradise with Thee.*