

The reason for choosing a choral piece was for a choral composition competition. This appealed to me because of my extensive background in solo vocal and choral music. The first step I took was to find a text to set. I specifically had a drawn an interest in old English and I figured since I was studying in England I would take advantages of the history, culture and local expertise. I chose the poem *Alone Walking*, by an anonymous author circa 1500, for the appropriate length and tone of the writing. Although I had a general understanding of the text, I have never worked with old English before. I met with Dr. Rory McTurk of the English department to discuss the language and context of the poem and to thoroughly grasp its pronunciation. I was then able to translate the text into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for the purpose of teaching the proper pronunciation to a choir.

Other preparation for writing this piece involved a year study of 16th century counterpoint, a year study of IPA and many years of choral experience. Directly related to this piece I was influenced by choral and vocal music of contemporary composers such as Arvo Pärt, George Crumb and Elliot Carter.

The structure and form of the piece was planned and laid out with a strong influence from the text. Although the poem is strophic I did not want the structure to be strophic, I was looking to eliminate the strophic sense and rhyming scheme that is prevalent in the poetry and, instead, have a developmental through composed piece that parallels the emotional lineage depicted in the poem. The lines in the poem were then planned out with designations such as dynamic levels, tempi, texture, colour, and descriptive words to elaborate what I sought for the character of the music as it pertained to the line of text. I decided to further facilitate the 16th century text and utilise some techniques of 16th century counterpoint to influence the general writing style of the piece. The intent behind this was to represent a renaissance atmosphere while writing in a contemporary context. It is for this reason that I chose to briefly bring back the opening thematic material in measure 57 and reflect a common practice of music from the 16th century.

I began writing melodically in terms of 16th century style but harmonically using uncharacteristic harmonies for the 16th century. This would gradually change as the piece progressed using open fifths or octaves to draw attention to particular phrases in the text. The textures were then applied based on the structure and rhythms were applied based on the required push and pull needed to exploit the textual undertones and subtext. The rhythms were also used as a means of keeping uniformity through the piece. Rhythmic patterns such as the straight crotchets beginning in measures 35-38 come back in measures 69-74. The triplet figure is the only alteration to the customary beat patterns engaged within this piece. This was intended to keep a relatively simple familiarity to the rhythmic style while manipulating the harmonic and melodic contours so to render a grave, docile quality.

Ornamentation was used to add a distressed quality and keep an almost folk-like and emotionally affected sound. These *appoggiaturas* are restricted to the soprano part where most of the melody lines are set. The intention for these decorations is to convey disruption and agony, very much like when ones voice cracks when trying to speak while crying. This draws attention to the melody line and further drives the listener to internally react.

There are various textures used throughout the piece. Beginning with a staggered entry, other textures utilised include parallel thirds, monophony, melody and accompaniment, single part, unison/octave doubling and spoken text. The purpose for each of these was chosen to assimilate a level of attention from the listener and associate an emotive reaction. For example, the parts with a single melody in one part without any accompaniment (measures 22-23 and 48-56) gives an empty value with a solitary result. The two moments where unison is featured (measures 32-33) draw a very dramatic attention which is followed by a tone cluster in a downward *glissando*. The text at this moment is very striking and required this deliberate means to stand out. The only part of the poem I deliberately repeated

is the words 'In remembrance' as if to signify mournful or desolate properties. The words appear at an ideal place in the music that a repeat of the text fit very well structurally and set an appropriate tone for the rest of the piece. The piece ends with the tenors and basses humming a drone while a female soloist speaks the last stanza of the poem. This is another passage of the music that is intended to emulate a broken-down sense of appeal, as though singing were too difficult in such dire conditions that it must be spoken.

The choral genre is a continued interest for me. The voice is a versatile medium and working with choral ensembles gives added insightfulness. This piece has captured an ambience that is not of current contemporary perception and yet is not intended to fit any other particular stylistic genre. The renaissance character of the piece is alluded to in a careful manner and portrays an otherworldly essence. Although there are challenging passages, this piece would be appropriate for any university level or semi-professional choir.