

Still Winter

For women's chorus

Words and music by Robert W. Griffin



Beinn Ard Publishing

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Contents

Introduction	v
Texts	1
I. A gray birch	3
II. Ravaged pillar	4
III. Beneath dark hemlocks	5

Introduction

This composition was inspired by a concert given by the Anima Women's Vocal Ensemble (animavermont.org) in April 2017. As I walked in the woods near our home later that day, I had the experiences described in the texts for the three movements: raising a birch bent across the path; stepping over the slivers of wood torn from a tree by a pileated woodpecker; and reaching deep into the green moss covering a stone wall running along the path I was following, and touching there the ice at the roots of the moss. Each of these experiences was a reminder that Winter was still a presence there in the forest, despite the moist smell of Spring in the air.

Though drawing on the experiences of a single afternoon, the three movements are somewhat different in mood. To reflect this, I used a different mode for each of the three movements. The first movement uses the Aeolian mode and starts and ends with an A minor chord built on the (untransposed) base pitch of that mode (though the opening chord is somewhat ambiguous and could be read as D-min7 rather than A-min4). The second movement uses the Phrygian mode, starting and ending with an E-minor chord. The third movement uses the Dorian mode, starting and ending with a D-minor chord.

The emotional impact of the various modes has been interpreted in many ways by different composers and theoreticians. My goal in "Still Winter" was not, however, to create texts to express the a priori emotional affect of a mode. Rather, I used the modes to help embody and elicit the experiences and emotions reflected in the texts, My hope is that these short songs will convey something of what I felt there in the forest, with at least a touch of humor as well.

Still Winter

I

A gray birch arched across the path,
Bow-bent by winter's last snow
Top touching earth, branchless lath
Lacking strength to rise alone.

I clasped my hands about her waist
And urged her lift her crown again.
Slowly straightening, sighing at my haste,
She swung upwards, stretched, unbent

At last, the few slight twiggy limbs
Held fast by a long-dead, rotten trunk.
And so I left her, to the whims
Of wind, once more dream-deep sunk.

II

Ravaged pillar
Pilaged by ravenous
Raven-black-backed
Red-crest plunderer,
Slivered wood,
Ivory on the umber ground,
Scattered at its feet.

III

Beneath dark hemlocks, a moss-covered wall
Winds through the woods, rock ridge of green
Bright in the shadow, each stone clothed
In fitted flannel enfolding cold,
Thriving on mist and shadowy sun.
Its moist scent is on the back of my tongue,
Green touch on my eyes, cool voice on the tips
Of my fingers that sink in root-deep to touch
The icy face of still winter.

I. "A gray birch"

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1 *mp* Andante $\text{♩} = 84$

Soprano *mp* A gray birch arched a - cross the path, bow -

Soprano *mp* A gray birch arched a - cross the path,

Alto *mp* A gray birch arched a - cross the path, bow - bent

4 bent bow - bent by win - ter's last snow,

bow - bent bow - - bent by win - ter's last snow,

bow - - bent bent by win - ter's last snow,

7 top touch - ing earth, branch - - less lath

top touch - ing earth, branch - - less lath

top touch - ing earth, branch - - less lath

10 lack - ing strength to rise a - lone. I clasped my hands

lack - ing strength to rise a - lone. I clasped my hands

lack - ing strength to rise a - lone. I clasped my hands

rit. *mf* *a tempo*

I. "A gray birch"

13

a - bout her waist urg - ing her urg - ing her urg - ing her to

a - bout her waist urg - ing her urg - ing her urg - ing her to

a - bout her waist urg - ing her urg - ing her urg - ing her to

16

lift her crown a - gain. Slow - ly,

lift her crown a - gain. Slow - ly,

lift her crown a - gain. Slow - ly,

19

slow - ly straigh - ten - ing, sigh - ing at my haste, she swung

slow - ly straigh - ten - ing, sigh - ing at my haste, she swung

slow - ly straigh - ten - ing, sigh - ing at my haste, she swung

22

up - wards, stretched, un - bent At last, the

up - wards, stretched, un - bent At last, the

up - wards, stretched, un - bent At last, the

25

few slight twig - gy limbs held fast in a

few slight twig - gy limbs held fast in a

few slight twig - gy limbs held fast in a

28

long - - dead, rot - ten trunk. And so I

long - - dead, rot - ten trunk. And so I

long - - - dead, rot - ten trunk. And so I

rit. *a tempo* *mp*

31

left her, left her, to the whims of

left her, left her, to the whims of

left her, left her, to the whims of

3

34

wind, once more dream - - - deep sunk.

wind, once more dream - - - deep sunk.

wind, once more dream - - - deep sunk.

p *rit.*

II. "Ravaged pillar"

1 *mp* *Adagio* ♩ = 60

Soprano *mp* Ra - vaged pil - lar pi - laged by ra - ve - nous ra - ven - black - backed red -

Soprano *mp* Ra - vaged pil - lar pi - laged by ra - ve - nous ra - ven - black - backed red -

Alto *mp* Ra - vaged pil - lar pi - laged by ra - ve - nous ra - ven - black - backed red -

3

crest plun - der - er, Sli - vered wood

crest plun - der - er, Sli - vered wood

crest plun - der - er, Sli - - - vered wood

5

i - vo - ry on the um - ber ground,

i - vo - ry on the um - ber ground, scat - - -

i - vo - ry on the um - ber ground, scat -

6

scat - - - - tered // *rit.* at its feet.

tered scat - tered // at its feet.

tered scat - tered // at its feet.

III. "Beneath dark hemlocks"

mp *Moderato*
♩ = 92

Soprano I
mp Be - neath dark hem - locks, a

Soprano II
mp Be - neath dark hem - locks, a

Alto I
mp Be - neath dark hem - locks, a

Alto II
mp Be - neath dark hem - locks, a

4

crescendo
moss - co - vered wall winds through the

crescendo
moss - co - vered wall winds through the

crescendo
moss - co - vered wall winds through the

crescendo
moss - co - vered wall winds through the

7

decrescendo *rit.* *mf* *a tempo*
woods, *decrescendo* rock ridge of green, *mf* bright

decrescendo *mf* bright

decrescendo *mf* bright

decrescendo *mf* bright

woods, rock ridge of green, bright

III. "Beneath dark hemlocks"

10

in the sha - dow, each stone clothed in
in the sha - dow, each stone clothed in
in the sha - dow, each stone clothed in
in the sha - dow, each stone clothed in

13

fit - - - ted flan - nel en - fold - ing
fit - - - ted flan - nel en - fold - ing
fit - - - ted flan - nel en - fold - ing
fit - - - ted flan - nel en - fold - ing

16

cold, thri - ving on mist
cold, thri - ving on mist
cold, thri - ving on mist
cold, thri - ving on mist

19 *rit.* *mp* *a tempo*

and sha - do - wy sun. *mp* Its moist

and sha - do - wy sun. *mp* Its moist scent

and sha - do - wy sun. *mp* Its moist scent

and sha - do - wy sun. Its moist

22 *crescendo*

scent is on the back of my tongue, green touch

is on the back of my tongue, green touch

is on the back of my tongue, green touch

scent is on the back of my tongue, green touch

25 *decrescendo*

on my eyes, cool voice on the tips of my

on my eyes, cool voice on the tips of my

on my eyes, cool voice on the tips of my

on my eyes, cool voice on the tips of my

III. "Beneath dark hemlocks"

28

fin - - - gers that sink in - - -

fin - - - gers that sink in - - -

fin - - - gers that sink in - - -

fin - - - gers that sink in - - -

fin - - - gers that sink in - - -

30

root - - - deep to touch the i - cy

root - - - deep to touch the i - cy

root - - - deep to touch the i - cy

root - - - deep to touch the i - cy

root - - - deep to touch the i - cy

32

decrescendo face *decrescendo* of still *rit.* win - - - ter.

decrescendo face *decrescendo* of still win - - - ter.

decrescendo face *decrescendo* of still win - - - ter.

face of still win - - - ter.