## Robinson McClellan

# They Worship Without Words

for SATB Choir (or SA with Organ or Strings)



#### THE THREE KINGS

Their wisdom is the load they bear unknowing, yet they bring a gift of glowing gold and fragrance fair and worship without words, and lift

a coin, a leaf, a herb, a prayer. They followed from their distant lands a star, and saved their riches rare to place the prizes in his hands.

He sees three rulers of the earth; he sees the gold, he hears them sing, he smells the fragrance. Fresh from birth, he need not tell them he is King.

© Robin Muir-Miller (used by permission)
This piece was written in collaboration with the poet.

Duration: 6 minutes

#### About the piece

The gently rocking ostinatos in the low voices might be the wordless worship of the Kings, while the sopranos (and later the altos) are outside the action, describing and commenting. Or perhaps you hear slowly plodding camels, or the heartbeats of the baby Jesus.

The harmonies in the low voices follow a pattern of ones and zeroes recently discovered lining the perimeter of a 16th-century carving from the King's bedroom at Scotland's Stirling Castle (see cover). Their meaning is unknown, but music scholar Barnaby Brown noticed that they closely resemble similar patterns used by early Welsh harpists to record harmonic patterns: in Welsh harp manuscripts of the same period, "I" represents the "home," consonant chord, while "O" represents the "away," dissonant one. The Stirling carving also includes a third sign, "II", which might indicate an altered version of "I". For background info, see http://pibroch.wordpress.com.

I like to imagine that the changing ostinatos in this piece, as they follow the harmonic pattern of Is, Os, and IIs, are like an invisible finger tenderly tracing its way around the Stirling Head, mysteriously drawing the music from each digit as it passes by, while the child-king sleeps below.

Following (in part) Barnaby Brown's example, here is how, for this piece, I divided the circular pattern:

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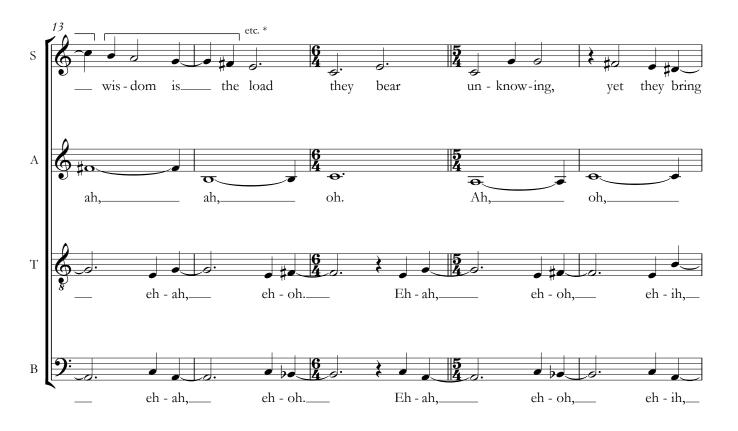
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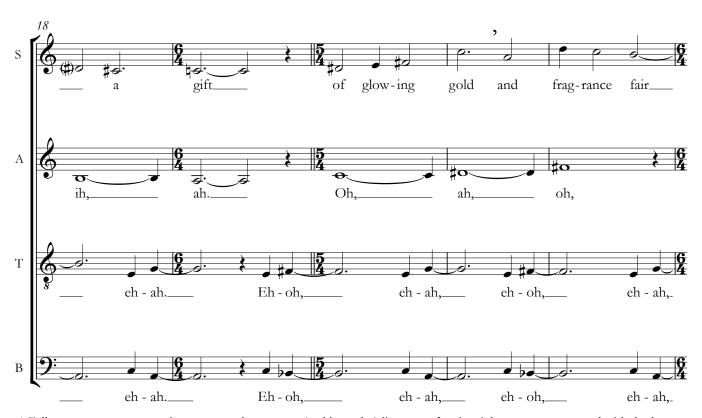




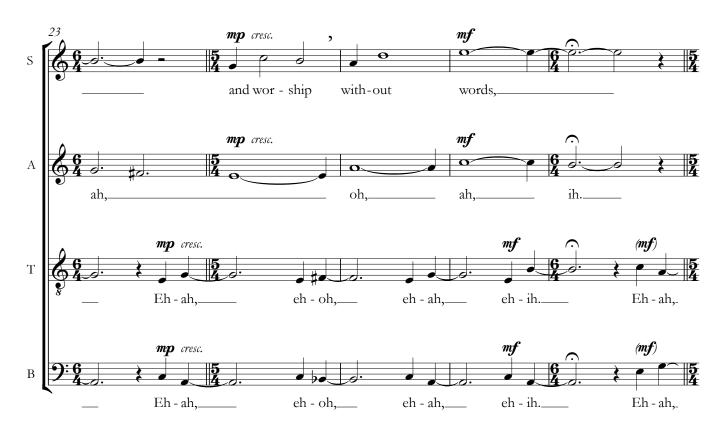
Staggered breathing my be helpful throughout.

- \* Vowels open and warm; pronounce "ih" as in "king."
- \*\*The Tenor and Bass parts, and the Alto part through m. 54, can alternatively be played by instruments such as cellos or organ.



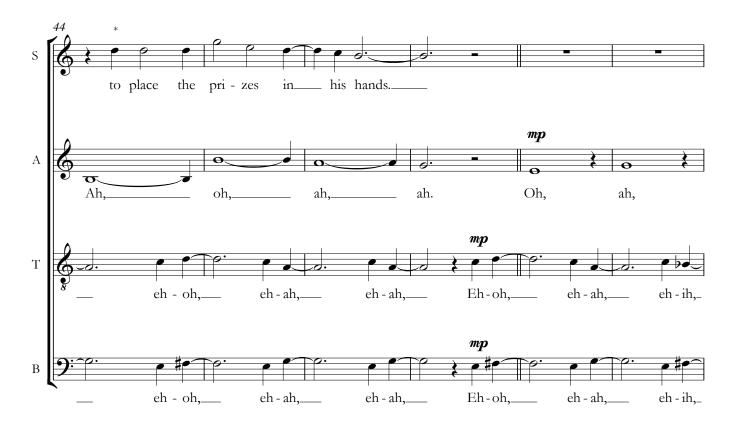


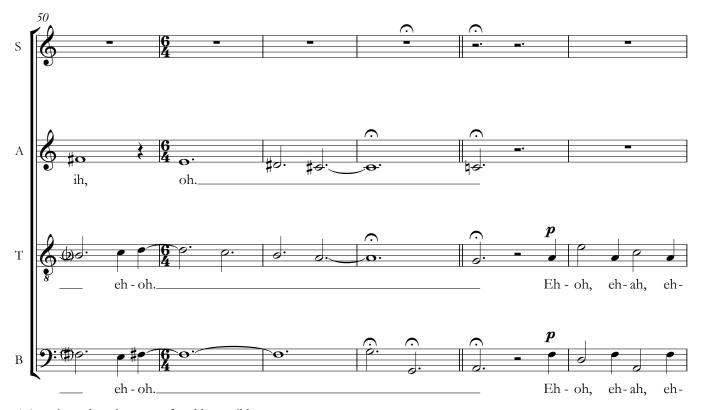
<sup>\*</sup> Follow text stresses, not written meters; the soprano (and later alto) lines are often in triple meters, punctuated with duple.





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<sup>\*</sup> As quiet and tender as comfortably possible.



