

Robinson McClellan

They Worship Without Words

for SATB Choir (or SA with Organ or Strings)



2009

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.

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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:

I O I I I O I I
O I I O I O I I
O I O I I O I I

I O I I I O I I
O I I I O I I O
I O I I O I I O

I O I I I O I I
I O I I I O I I
I O I I (repeats several times)

to the poet, for her help and inspirations

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Robin Muir-Miller

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$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 90$

Soprano

Alto *mp Sempre molto legato*
Ah, oh, ah, ah.

Tenor *mp Sempre molto legato*
Eh - ah,* eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ah. Eh - ah,

Bass *mp Sempre molto legato*
Eh - ah,* eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ah. Eh - ah,

7

S *mp Sempre molto legato*
Their.

A *mp*
Ah, oh, ah, ih.* Eh,

T *mp*
eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ih. Eh - oh, eh - ah,

B *mp*
eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ih. Eh - oh, eh - ah,

Staggered breathing may 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.

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13 etc. *

S — wis - dom is — the load they bear un - know - ing, yet they bring

A ah, — ah, — oh. Ah, — oh, —

T — eh - ah, — eh - oh. — Eh - ah, — eh - oh, — eh - ih, —

B — eh - ah, — eh - oh. — Eh - ah, — eh - oh, — eh - ih, —

18

S — a gift — of glow - ing gold and frag - rance fair —

A ih, — ah. — Oh, — ah, — oh,

T — eh - ah. — Eh - oh, — eh - ah, — eh - oh, — eh - ah, —

B — eh - ah. — Eh - oh, — eh - ah, — eh - oh, — eh - ah, —

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

23

S *mp cresc.* , *mf*
 _____ and wor - ship with - out words, _____

A *mp cresc.* *mf*
 ah, _____ oh, _____ ah, _____ ih. _____

T *mp cresc.* *mf* (*mf*)
 — Eh - ah, _____ eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____ eh - ih. _____ Eh - ah, _____

B *mp cresc.* *mf* (*mf*)
 — Eh - ah, _____ eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____ eh - ih. _____ Eh - ah, _____

28

S *mp cresc.*
 _____ and lift a coin, a leaf, a herb,

A *mf* *dim.* *p* *mp cresc.*
 Ah, oh, ah, ah. Ah, _____ oh, _____

T *dim.* *p* *mp cresc.*
 — eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____ eh - ah. _____ Eh - ah, _____ eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____

B *dim.* *p* *mp cresc.*
 — eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____ eh - ah. _____ Eh - ah, _____ eh - oh, _____ eh - ah, _____

44

S ***
to place the pri - zes in his hands.

A
Ah, oh, ah, ah. *mp* Oh, ah,

T *mp*
— eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ah, Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ih,

B *mp*
— eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ah, Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - ih,

50

S
—

A
ih, oh.

T *p*
— eh - oh. Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh -

B *p*
— eh - oh. Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh -

* As quiet and tender as comfortably possible.

56

S

A *mp*
He sees three rul-ers_____ of the earth;_____

T *(sim.)*
oh, eh,____ eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih,____ Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh,____ eh -

B
oh, eh,____ eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih,____ Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh,____ eh -

61

S *mp*
he hears them sing,_____ he hears_____ them

A *(mp)*
he sees the gold,____ he hears them sing,_____ he hears, he hears them

T *(p)*
oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih,____ Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh -

B *(p)*
oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih,____ Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh -

65

S
sing, ——— sing, ———

A
— sing, ——— sing, ———

T
oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih. — *(p)* Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh -

B
- oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih. — *(p)* Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh-

69

S
ah, ———

A
oh, ———

T
oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih. — *(p)* Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh -

B
- oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, ih. — *(p)* Eh - oh, eh-ah, eh - oh, eh-oh, eh-

73

S he smells the frag - rance.

A he smells the frag - rance.

T oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, ih. *(p)* Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, eh. Eh -

B - oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, ih. *(p)* Eh - oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, eh. Eh -

77

S *pp* Fresh - (shh) *n. ppp* from birth,

A *pp* Fresh - (shh) *n. ppp* from birth, *pp* he

T *dim.* oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, eh. *pp* Eh - ah, *(pp)* eh - oh,

B *dim.* oh, eh - ah, eh - oh, eh. *pp* Eh - ah, *(pp)* eh - oh,

83

p cresc.

S

he

A

need not tell them he is

p *p cresc.*

T

eh - ah, eh - ah. Eh - ah, eh - oh,

B

eh - ah, eh - ah. Eh - ah, eh - oh,

p

88

mp dim. **Rall., morendo** *pp dim.* *ppp*

S

is King King King

mp dim. *pp dim.* *ppp*

A

King King King

pp *ppp*

T

eh - ah, eh - ih, eh - ih, eh - ih.

pp *ppp*

B

eh - ah, eh - ih, eh - ih, eh - ih.