Benjamin Britten

Hymn to St. Cecilia

Op. 27

for unaccompanied chorus

Words by

W. H. Auden

London · Paris · Bonn · Johannesburg · Sydney · Toronto · New York

HYMN TO ST. CECILIA

I

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.

Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

ΙI

I cannot grow; I have no shadow To run away from, I only play.

I cannot err; There is no creature Whom I belong to, Whom I could wrong.

I am defeat When it knows it Can now do nothing By suffering.

All you lived through, Dancing because you No longer need it For any deed.

I shall never be Different. Love me.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions To all musicians, appear and inspire: Translated Daughter, come down and startle Composing mortals with immortal fire. O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall, O calm of spaces unafraid of weight, Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all The gaucheness of her adolescent state, Where Hope within the altogether strange From every outworn image is released, And Dread born whole and normal like a beast Into a world of truths that never change: Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.

O dear white children casual as birds, Playing among the ruined languages, So small beside their large confusing words, So gay against the greater silences Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head, Impetuous child with the tremendous brain, O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain, Lost innocence who wished your lover dead, Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin Is drawn across our trembling violin.

O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.

O law drummed out by hearts against the still Long winter of our intellectual will.

That what has been may never be again.

O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath Of convalescents on the shores of death.

O bless the freedom that you never chose.

O trumpets that unguarded children blow About the fortress of their inner foe.

O wear your tribulation like a rose.

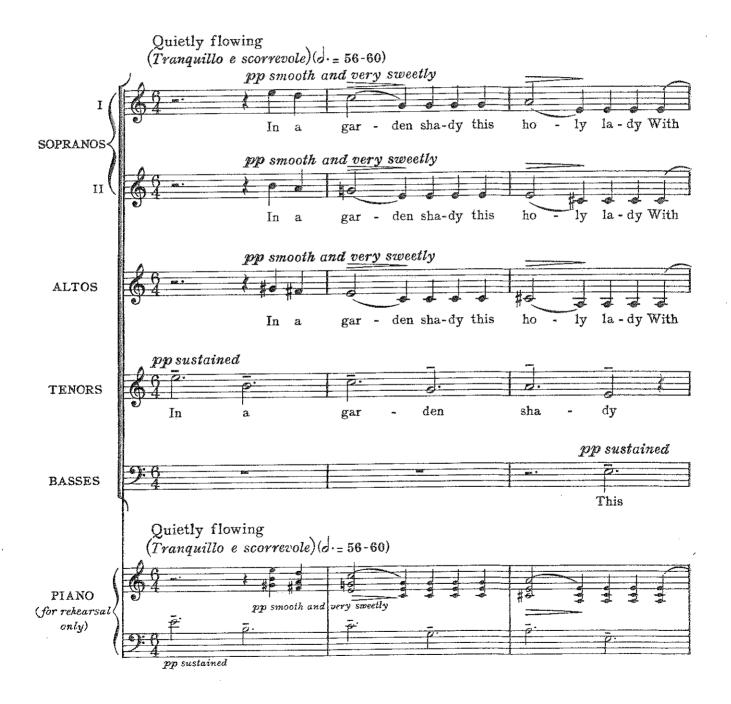
Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
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W. H. AUDEN.

To Elizabeth Mayer

Hymn to St. Cecilia

Words by W. H. AUDEN Music by BENJAMIN BRITTEN Op.27







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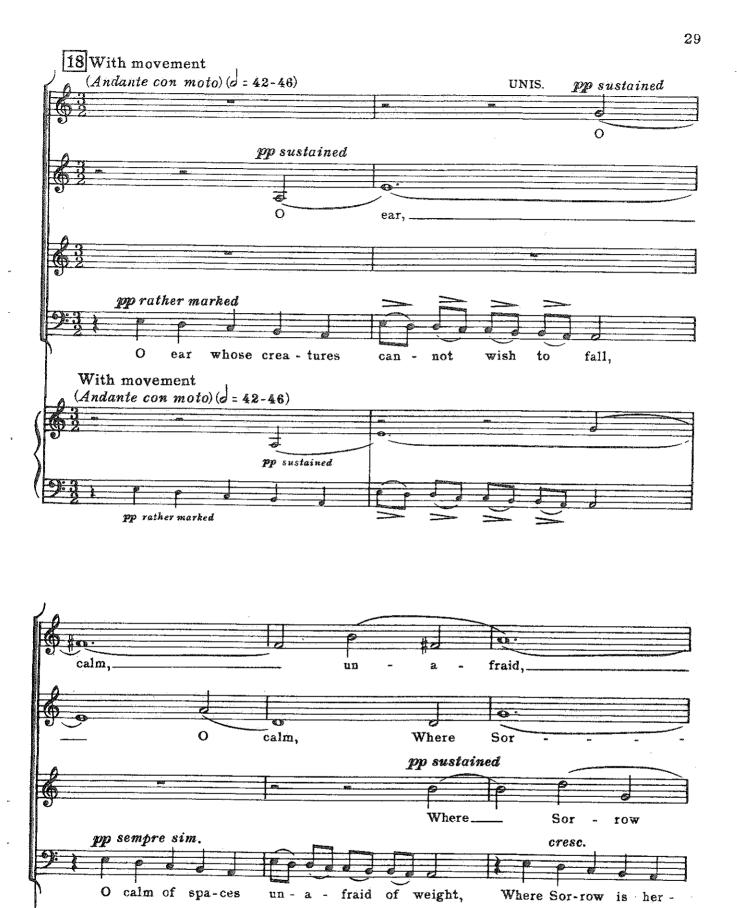
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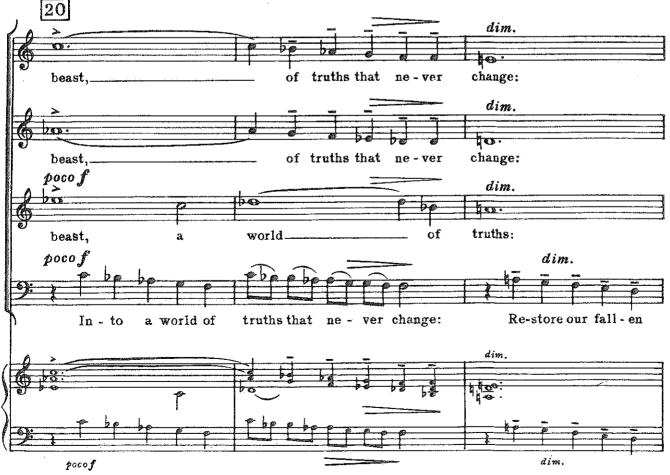
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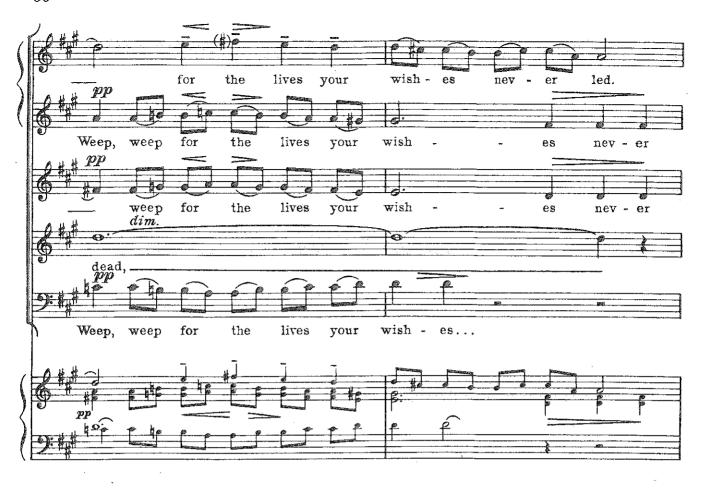
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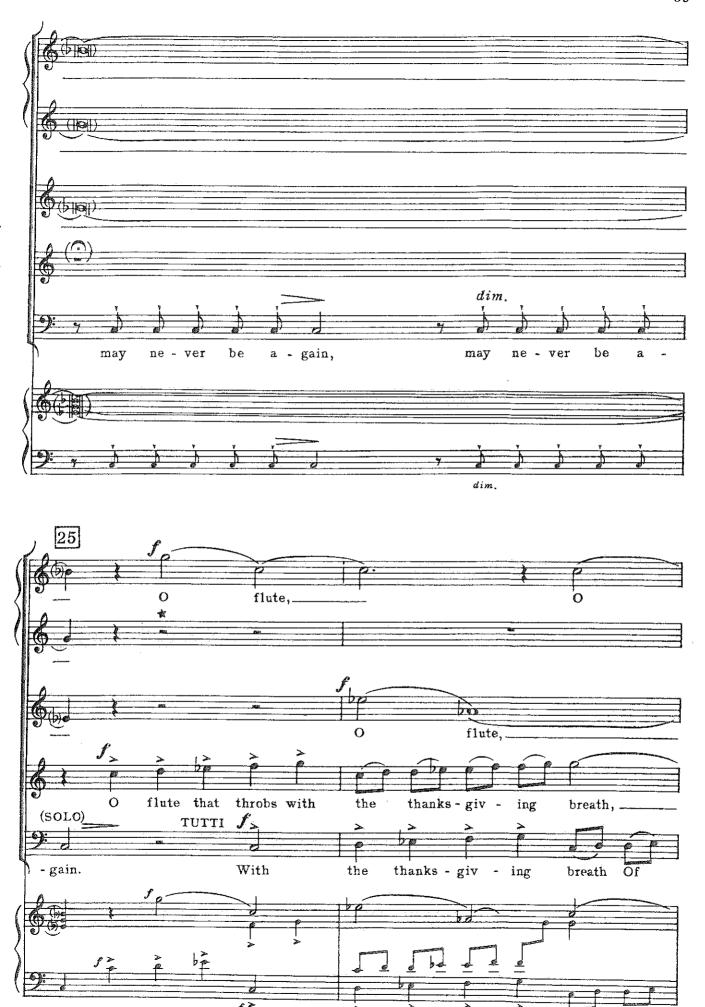






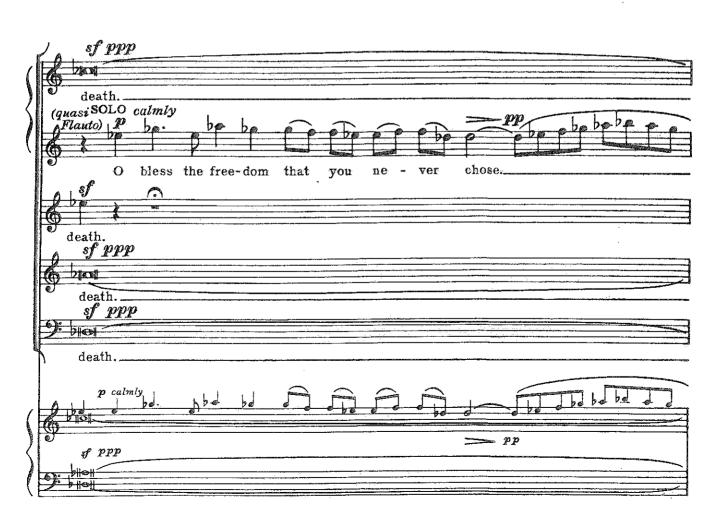


*With Tenors ad lib. for three bars.



^{*}With Sopranos I ad lib. for five bars.







*With Basses ad lib.for five bars.





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