

"A Prayer In Spring" was commissioned in 1990 by the Bennington County Choral Society, Edwin Lawrence, Director, and was first performed by them in collaboration with the Bennington Children's Chorus, Barabara Kourajian, Director. At these first performances Robin Lehleitner was the soprano soloist, and Sara Krohn was the pianist.

The work is a setting of ten poems by Robert Frost, who at one time taught at Bennington College and had a house in North Bennington. Robert Frost is buried in back of the Old First Church in Bennington. I selected poems that deal with the transition from Fall to Winter, and with experiences taking place in Winter itself, and then placed the poem "A Prayer In Spring" last. Frost's poems are full of nature imagery, but seem to me to primarily express psychological states. They contain remarkably little human contact, and seem the work of a person accustomed to solitude. It is significant that the "Prayer" is not so much an ode to Spring, as an expression of a longing to be able to appreciate it and put one's faith in it when it comes. Allen Shawn

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Special thanks to Kerry Ryer-Parke and the Bennington Children's Chorus for their participation in the concert; and to Suzanne Jones, Linda Patterson, Jason Sabol, Lisa Lynch, Chris Molina, Ben Mayock, Susan Reiss and Jim Hasenfus for their extra efforts and support.

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Music at Bennington presents...

VOCAL CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Tom Bogdan and Allen Shawn, directors

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a cappella Folk Songs by Béla Bartók

and

A Prayer in Spring by Allen Shawn
A Cantata set to poems by Robert Frost

with the Bennington Children's Chorus
Kerry Ryer-Parke, director

and

Lisa Lynch, soprano

Friday, December 7, 2001

8:00 pm

Deane Carriage Barn

PROGRAM

Choruses for female voices

Béla Bartók

Country Songs for male voices

Belá Bartók

A Prayer in Spring (1990)

Allen Shawn
poems by Robert Frost

1. *In Hardwood Groves*
2. *Now Close the Windows*
3. *Acquainted with the Night*
4. *The Last Word of a Bluebird
as Told to a Child*
5. *The Night Light*
6. *Good Hours*
7. *Willful Homing*
8. *To A Moth Seen in Winter*
9. *Were I In Trouble*
10. *A Prayer in Spring*

Vocal Chamber Ensemble Bennington Children's Chorus

Lisa Lynch, soprano Allen Shawn, piano

Lisa Lynch, Linda Patterson,
Jason Sabol, Chris Molina, quartet

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
VOCAL CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Tom Bogdan and Allen Shawn, directors

Nicole Asselin,
Elizabeth Berkowitz-Geller,
Andrea Boothby,
Sarah Courtney, Judith Gold,
Emily Larson, Lisa Lynch,
Amanda Parla,
Linda Patterson,
Nina Salzman,
Hannah Strom-Martin,
Kathryn (K.J) Swanson,
Sarah Vautier, Jennifer White

David Borenstein, Paul Garcia,
Shantonu Lala, Rick Little,
Travis Magrane,
Mario Martinez, Ben Mayock,
Chris Molina, Tadd Morgan,
Scott Neagle, John Pellington,
Jason Sabol, Jeremy Schulick,
Paul Vargas.

BENNINGTON CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Kerri Ryer-Parke, director

Ashley Amos, Anna Crabtree,
Anya Eckhardt,
Katharine Gibson,
Kerry Gleason, Sarah Gleason,
Jason Jansen, Diandra Kalish,
Kathleen Kimball,
Crystal Matteson,
Noe Matteson, Maria Mason,
Mallary Meerwarth

Gabrielle Mele-Algus,
Ming Ni,
Daniela Noguera-Garces,
Emily Perkins,
Morgan Provost,
Shaun Provost,
Emily Pietrucha, Jackie Redick,
Rebecca Sklepowicz,
Roxy Sperber, Zoe Sperber,
Lucy White

Nor will you find love either nor love you.
 And what I pity in you is something human,
 The old incurable untimeliness,
 Only begetter of all ills that are.
 But go. You are right. My pity cannot help.
 Go till you wet your pinions and are quenched.
 You must be made more simply wise than I
 To know the hand I stretch impulsively
 Across the gulf of well nigh everything
 May reach to you, but cannot touch your fate.
 I cannot touch your life, much less can save,
 Who am tasked to save my own a little while.

Circa 1900

9. WERE I IN TROUBLE

Where I could think of no thoroughfare,
 Away on the mountain up far too high,
 A blinding headlight shifted glare
 And began to bounce down a granite stair
 Like a star fresh fallen out of the sky.
 And I away in my opposite wood
 Am touched by that unintimate light
 And made feel less alone than I rightly should,
 For traveler there could do me no good
 Were I in trouble with night tonight.

10. A PRAYER IN SPRING

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;
 And give us not to think so far away
 As the uncertain harvest; keep us here
 All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,
 Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
 And make us happy in the happy bees,
 The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird
 That suddenly above the bees is heard,
 The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
 And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,
 The which it is reserved for God above
 To sanctify to what far ends He will,
 But which it only needs that we fulfill.

TEXTS Béla Bartók

"Choruses for Female Voices"

1. Spring

The swallow is a beautiful bird
 and beautifully it sings
 In the morning when the dew
 falls off the branches;
 The baby skylark rips the sky
 With its wings,
 Sings marvellously and treads on sunbeams
 With its feet.

All animals rejoice,
 The small birds enliven;
 In the dawn full of pearly dew the little birds
 Gather into groups,
 The flowers open up, the grasses are fragrant
 In the meadows.

The spring wind blows,
 The farmer gets up
 and gets behind the plough;
 He yokes his oxen, tills his soil
 Steadily,
 He does his work and turns the furrows.
 Decently.

His Majesty, God blesses him
 And sustains the ploughman and sown
 It is He who turns his ploughs sickles
 And all the farmer's tools,
 He disposes over life on Earth and salvation
 In Heaven.

2. Don't leave me here

If only you'd tell me, my rose
 Which road you are taking.
 I would plough that road
 With a golden plough.

I would sow that land
 With pearls picked one by one,
 I would harrow it
 With my quick tears

"Country Songs" for male voices"

1.

My God, life is not very wonderful
 My two eyes are withered from crying,
 I am like a dry feather
 Whose bloom was
 Taken by a bird of prey.
 Where shall I end my life -
 in the forests, or fields,
 or rather in the ocean?

2.

Near the village of Kilyenfalvi is a mill
 Where girls are gathered together.
 It is called The Girls' Mill
 And to go there is really great.

"Look here, Rosie,
 I have come to be with you even if it is late.
 I could come every evening
 Because I don't live very far away"

"I see, my sweetheart,
 That you've come to be with me,
 Even though it's late.
 You could continue to come every night
 Because you don't live
 Very far from the Mill."

A PRAYER IN SPRING

Texts (Robert Frost)

1. IN HARDWOOD GROVES

The same leaves over and over again!
They fall from giving shade above
To make one texture of faded brown
And fit the earth like a leather glove.

Before the leaves can mount again
To fill the trees with another shade,
They must go down past things coming up.
They must go down into the dark decayed.

They *must* be pierced by flowers and put
Beneath the feet of dancing flowers.
However it is in some other world
I know that this is the way in ours.

2. NOW CLOSE THE WINDOWS

Now close the windows and hush all the fields:
If the trees must, let them silently toss;
No bird is singing now, and if there is,
Be it my loss.

It will be long ere the marshes resume,
It will be long ere the earliest bird:
So close the windows and not hear the wind,
But see all wind-stirred.

3. ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

4. THE LAST WORD OF A BLUEBIRD

AS TOLD TO A CHILD

As I went out a Crow
In a low voice said, 'Oh,
I was looking for you.
How do you do?
I just came to tell you
To tell Lesley (will you?)
That her little Bluebird
Wanted me to bring word
That the north wind last night
That made the stars bright
And made ice on the trough
Almost made him cough
His tail feathers off.
He just had to fly!
But he sent her Good-by,
And said to be good,
And wear her red hood,
And look for skunk tracks
In the snow with an ax—
And do everything!
And perhaps in the spring
He would come back and sing.'

5. THE NIGHT LIGHT

She always had to burn a light
Beside her attic bed at night.
It gave bad dreams and broken sleep,
But helped the Lord her soul to keep.
Good gloom on her was thrown away.
It is on me by night or day,
Who have, as I suppose, ahead
The darkest of it still to dread.

6. GOOD HOURS

I had for my winter evening walk—
No one at all with whom to talk,
But I had the cottages in a row
Up to their shining eyes in snow.

And I thought I had the folk within:
I had the sound of a violin;
I had a glimpse through curtain laces
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.

I had such company outward bound.
I went till there were no cottages found.
I turned and repented, but coming back
I saw no window but that was black.

Over the snow my creaking feet
Disturbed the slumbering village street
Like profanation, by your leave,
At ten o'clock of a winter eve.

7. WILLFUL HOMING

It is getting dark and time he drew to a house,
But the blizzard blinds him to any house ahead.
The storm gets down his neck in an icy souse
That sucks his breath like a wicked cat in bed.

The snow blows on him and off him, exerting force,
Downward to make him sit astride a drift,
Imprint a saddle and calmly consider a course.
He peers out shrewdly into the thick and swift.

Since he means to come to a door he will come to a door,
Although so compromised of aim and rate
He may fumble wide of the knob a yard or more,
And to those concerned he may seem a little late.

8. TO A MOTHS SEEN IN WINTER

Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket,
A perch and resting place 'twixt wood and wood,
Bright-black-eyed silvery creature, brushed with brown.
The wings not folded in repose, but spread.
(Who would you be, I wonder, by those marks
If I had moths to friend as I have flowers?)
And now pray tell what lured you with false hope
To make the venture of eternity
And seek the love of kind in wintertime?
But stay and hear me out. I surely think
You make a labor of flight for one so airy,
Spending yourself too much in self-support.