

Reviews of Hymn-Based Compositions

Jane Best

All prices in U. S. dollars

New Music

We Sing to You, O God. Arr. Thomas Keesecker. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1402-7, 2016. \$1.80. 2-part mixed, piano.

This worshipful text by Gracia Grindal celebrates God's unfailing love. A choir might find it useful during Advent or Lent. In addition, this piece would work well on other occasions to accompany the reading of Psalm 91 or any other scripture with references to *wings* or *eagles*.

The tune is a setting of DOLGELLY, a nineteenth-century Welsh tune in a minor mode with many flavor notes. Each voice part is featured in a solo verse, followed by a verse in two-part harmony, and then a final verse with a descant. The largely chordal piano accompaniment provides melodic support without playing the entire tune, and changes to quickly flowing arpeggios in the final verse about taking refuge in God's wings, ending with a final major chord on the word *trust*. People will enjoy this.

Jesus Comes, the Mystery Proclaiming. John Carter. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1392-1, 2016. \$1.80. SAB, piano

Mary Kay Beall has written this Christmas text with the phrase "Jesus comes" at the beginning and ending of each of the four brief verses. The final line in each verse builds energy with three internal rhymes, creating a dance feeling purely through the text itself. This lilting piece has a limited range and would not be hard to learn, yet each verse is voiced and accompanied differently and the rhythm is varied as well. All too often our choirs have to learn a mountain of Christmas music in a short time. This one would be a pleasure.

Your Little Ones, Dear Lord. Arr. Nancy M. Raabe. Augsburg Fortress 978-1-5064-1403-4, 2016. \$1.80. 2-part mixed, piano.

This is a Christmas text by Danish Pastor Hans Brorson (1694-1764) in a translation by Harriet Krauth Spaeth (1845-1925), a devotional prayer with slightly old-fashioned language which is easy to follow despite some inverted phrases. The melody is a heritage tune, HER KOMMER DINE ARME SMA, a simple, child-like tune which may take Lutherans back to their childhood memories. According to Hymnary.org it may be found in 14 hymnals. The accompaniment is delightful, with full harmonies and lots of eighth-note movement under the slower notes in the melody. The arranger clearly expects the choir to want to sing the melody, so it is passed back and forth between the two parts, and although there is very little harmony singing, the keyboard part is richly varied and will make the vocal simplicity seem like more.

O Gracious Light. Waylon Whitley. Paraclete PPM01605, 2016. \$1.70. 2-part treble choir, handbells, and organ.

A familiar prayer for Evensong is given new life in this imaginative piece. A treble choir with some experience would enjoy singing this music, which builds to jubilant praise. The song opens with handbells playing a four-note motif which is then repeated by the voices. The organ continues to develop this motif throughout as the song increases in complexity. At the climax, there is a brief, aleatoric passage in which the voices, bells, and organ repeat their parts at various tempos for a few seconds, building to a fortissimo, and then the song ends with a hushed *Amen*. The composer calls for Zimbelstern in the organ, and it appears to need five bell-ringers. I would like to hear this anthem!

There Is a Balm in Gilead. Arr. Stephan Casurella. Paraclete PPM01617, \$1.70. 2-part treble choir, organ.

Here is a gentle and slow arrangement of this traditional spiritual. The organ introduction is built on the melodic notes for “There is a” and uses that figure again between the verses. The song opens with unison singing over a subtle chordal accompaniment featuring mellow sevenths. When the two-part singing begins, the voices move with rhythmic independence with the melody in the lower part, so a choir with confidence would learn this readily, though they wouldn’t feel it was too simple. This comforting song would be suitable for the Lenten season and for general use.

One of My “Old” Favorites

The Lone, Wild Bird. Arr. Ruth Elaine Schram. Alfred Publishing, 23712, 2005. \$1.75. SATB, piano, and flute.

This anthem is an arrangement of PROSPECT set for piano and mixed voices. Both SATB and SAB (23713) are available. The piano is flowing and gentle throughout. The flute introduces the hymn and then weaves into the harmony several times in each verse, soaring toward the end. The women and the men each get a chance to sing part of the tune, before the texture thickens and the four parts are brought together. The three verses of text by Henry Richard McFadyen (1877-1964) have been slightly modernised, but the central idea of trusting and resting in God has been retained clearly. My community choir here in northern Ontario asks for this piece which fits very well in our mix of cultures. “Great Spirit, come, and rest in me, too.”

Jane Best is the director of the Manitoulin Community Choir and one of the worship leaders of the Island Community Church. She teaches piano and other instruments, and is a composer with anthems published by Kelman Hall Publishing and Cypress Choral Music. Her hymns may be found in various collections. In 2013, Wayne Leupold Editions published *Flowing Spirit*, a small volume of her hymns. A new SAB anthem, *Hope is a Seed*, with a text by Mary Louise Bringle, will be available from GIA this summer.