

Great War Triptych Program Notes

Great War Triptych (2019), composed for the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, is my setting for SATB chorus and string quartet of selected poems written during the war. The first movement is a setting of Sara Teasdale's poem *Spring in War-Time*. Each of the four stanzas of the poem begins with ruminations on the beauties and joys of spring but ends with the clashing juxtaposition of the horrors of war and questions of how spring can exist in the context of war. In my setting, the strings interrupt our quiet ruminations forcing us to face the difficult, burning questions.

The second movement is a setting of two poems: *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae and *We Shall Keep the Faith* by Moina Michael. The text of *In Flanders Fields* is written from the perspective of the men who fought and died in Flanders Fields and is set for tenors and basses only. Moina Michael read *In Flanders Fields* and was so moved that she wrote *We Shall Keep the Faith* and dedicated the rest of her life to raising funds to support veterans of the war. My setting of *We Shall Keep the Faith* begins with sopranos and altos only, who are then joined by the full chorus.

The third movement is a setting of the well-known poem by Alan Seeger, *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*. This has been one of my favorite poems for many years, in part because of its universality and the various images that are evoked. My setting alternates between energetic agitated passages and more serene sections depending on the mood of the text.

While there are life-affirming moments in *Spring in War-Time* and much of *We Shall Keep the Faith* is life-affirming, in the end death always wins. Neither Alan Seeger nor John McCrae survived the war. Seeger was killed in action in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme while McCrae died in 1918 of pneumonia and meningitis.

I have dedicated this work to Christina Gamota, who has been a tireless supporter of many worthy local causes over the years. The inspiration to set *In Flanders Fields* resulted from Christina's fund raiser for veterans, and she introduced me to the companion poem *We Shall Keep the Faith*.

John M. Tarrh