

A Bigger Table (Part 1 of 3)

One of the many wonderful things about working at The University of Arizona is living in Tucson, a UNESCO World City of Gastronomy with a rich culinary heritage that spans 5,000 years. On any given day, I can opt to enjoy not only the traditional Mexican and Native food and drink of this region, but also an abundance of food from around the world, proudly and lovingly prepared and shared, including Bosnian, Danish, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Jamaican, Korean, Persian, Peruvian, Polish, Puerto Rican, Salvadorian, Syrian, Turkish and Vietnamese, as well as regional American foods, and many more and perhaps more familiar cuisines. What a joy it is to savor this food, and to learn about these traditions and cultures from those who know it, live it, and love it.

Likewise, this section of the *Choral Journal* is a rich banquet of information about music spanning countries, regions, traditions and ethnicities, and representing a variety of populations. Each section in this three-part series includes two feature articles that provide in-depth information on lesser-known composers and/or works, generously researched and shared by exceptional scholars. Each issue also will contain a curated review section highlighting three choral reviews and one sound review of beautiful music that is likely new to many. In the third and final installment of this section (March/April 2026), Erik Peregrine will offer a menu of valuable resources to support and facilitate personal exploration of a wide range of musics. What a gift and a delight to be able to experience and learn about all of the powerful and moving music shared in this focus section, proudly and lovingly shared with our community by this joyful company of scholars. I invite you to pull a chair up to the table and try something new from the abundance before you.

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Tammy Bummell*



Felicitas Kukuck

Composing Against All Odds

SHEKELA WANYAMA

Felicitas Kukuck (1914–2001) was a prolific German music educator and composer who lived through both world wars in Germany. The socio-economic and political upheaval of the time had a tremendous impact on her life and output. She wrote over one thousand works, including for chamber ensembles, piano, flute, and solo voice, though the bulk of her output is choral. Her choral music suits singers of varying levels of experience, often allows for adaptation as needed, and is neatly crafted with both musicians and listeners in mind. Her works display approaches to structure and melody that recall Johannes Brahms and Hugo Distler, and harmonic language that reflects her study with Paul Hindemith. All of her vocal works are in German. Due to the post-World War II recovery period that overlapped with Kukuck's most prolific years, as well as challenges she faced during her lifetime as a woman of Jewish descent in Germany, only a small percentage of her compositions are easily accessible to conductors today. However, taking some extra time to investigate her works will yield rewards for the dedicated conductor. This article provides a start.

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Biography

Felicitas Kukuck was born Felicitas Cohnheim on November 2, 1914, in Hamburg, Germany. Her father was a physiologist and her mother was a trained classical singer, and both were supportive of their four children's musical aptitude. Felicitas sang songs with her mother from an early age, beginning piano lessons at the age of ten and improvising songs on piano with her younger brother, Fritz. Her childhood was not without challenges: World War I broke out just four months before she was born. In 1916 her parents changed their family name from the Jewish-origin Cohnheim to Germanic-origin Kestner out of concern for the family's safety. At the end of World War I, Felicitas and her sister had the good fortune to travel to the Netherlands for six weeks as part of a wartime recovery program for children. This early experience may have contributed to her later dedication to children's health, well-being, and education.

She eventually returned to Hamburg and went on to attend the city's renowned Lichtwarkschule, a school that emphasized critical thinking, creativity, and the arts. When the Nazis came to power and took over the school in 1933, she transferred to the Schule am Meer on the island of Juist—a residential school that emphasized the performing arts. While her time there was short, this was perhaps a formative time for Kukuck, as pianist and composer Eduard Zuckmayer conducted the school's choir and orchestra. Zuckmayer was also



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well acquainted with Paul Hindemith, who would later become Felicitas's primary composition teacher. Unfortunately, the Schule am Meer closed just one year after Kukuck enrolled, as many students from Jewish families were forced to emigrate due to the extreme anti-Semitic sentiment in Germany. Kukuck finished her studies at the progressive Odenwaldschule in 1935.

The year 1933 was pivotal for the Kukuck family. Despite changing the family's name to Kestner two decades earlier, and although the family had long been members of the German Evangelical Church, the family's Jewish ancestry came to light, and Felicitas's father lost his position at the university in Hamburg. He had served, with honors, in the German military during World War I, but that did not save him from the Nazi government. Their house was raided in 1933, and their lives were made increasingly difficult as World War II drew near. Kukuck wrote in her autobiography:

This was how German Jews were treated at the time by German Nazis. Even now this makes me so furious that I feel absolutely miserable. But I know I must not let go of it. Everyone should know about this. All the details, so that something so cruel and inhumane will never happen again.¹

Her parents and younger brother reluctantly emigrated to England in 1939. Life in England wasn't easy but was somewhat safer at that time.

In 1935, Kukuck wished to pursue post-secondary studies in music education in Berlin but was told she wouldn't be allowed to teach in schools due to her Jewish ancestry. She then enrolled at the Musikhochschule Berlin, where she studied flute and piano and passed the required exams to teach private lessons. At the same time she learned she had passed these exams, she received official notice that she was forbidden also from teaching privately. Kukuck continued her studies, playing in the orchestra and singing in two choirs, in addition to studying piano. She then had what she considered a life-changing stroke of good fortune: she joined the composition class taught by Paul Hindemith.²

Studying composition with Hindemith was a joy for Kukuck. She and her classmates met with him three

times a week from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. Each student brought their pieces with them, and Hindemith offered feedback on each piece with all students watching and learning. Sometimes they collaborated on writing three-part pieces at the chalkboard, each student taking a part and working it into the other two parts. For Kukuck, the most exciting aspect of learning from Hindemith was his approach to melody. The melody "wasn't supposed to be a song, or a sonata theme, or a fugue theme, but rather a melody in itself."³ She would later tell her daughter, Margret Johannsen, that Hindemith saw melody like a jewel in a ring: the band of the ring exists to decorate the jewel and bring out its beauty. Similarly, Kukuck's writing begins with melody, and the rest of the music exists to help the melody shine.⁴

Hindemith also influenced Kukuck's perspective on composition as a practice. He encouraged his students to consider the text, the performers, the audience, even the performance space, when writing music. His lessons stayed with her:

Composing is my life. I am happy that I can compose, and that I can always learn more about it. At the same time, it also means that I am in contact with and among people. New compositions aren't for the drawer, not for me. They should be sung and played. They are for other people.⁵

Hindemith left Germany in 1938, and Kukuck continued to work toward her final exam in piano performance, which occurred in 1939. Her exam selections showed her dedication to Hindemith, who at the time was designated as a "degenerate" composer by the Nazi Music Chamber. Kukuck included a piece by Hindemith on her exam to honor him and his impact on her development as a musician and composer. She did this against the advice of her piano teacher, who was a member of the Nazi party (perhaps reluctantly) and wore a swastika on his lapel. He was concerned his colleagues might not pass Kukuck due to her choice of repertoire but, in the end, he allowed her to play the piece and likely shared her sense of relief when the committee gave her passing marks.⁶

Three days after passing her exam, Felicitas married Dietrich Kukuck, a friend from school who also played in the Hochschule orchestra. Dietrich may have helped save her life: before their marriage, he secretly found a sympathetic clerk to change Felicitas's documents to reflect Kestner as her official birthname rather than Cohnheim, which still remained on the original document. This hid her Jewish ancestry on government paperwork. Their marriage was a happy one, with their first son born in 1940 in Berlin. Shortly after, Dietrich was called up to serve in the German military, and Felicitas was left to care for herself and their young son during the horrors of World War II. In addition, she supported a young Jewish woman who needed shelter and food. Kukuck remained in Germany while so many members of her family and her friends chose to leave. She explained in a 1980 interview: "The music—German music, the land of Johann Sebastian Bach—held me tightly. I was rooted here. I wanted to live here. I would never have left."⁷

After the war, Felicitas and Dietrich were fortunate to find each other again in Hamburg and remained in the area. She gave birth to three more children and continued her disciplined composition practice. Collaborations with choir directors, school teachers, and church musicians brought numerous commissions and occasions to write music for many different instruments and musicians at varying levels of experience. Kukuck wrote canons and simple part-songs for school music books, pieces for beginning piano and guitar students, and arranged folk songs for amateur choirs. A collegial working relationship with Gottfried Wolters, conductor of the Norddeutschen Singkreis, led to a number of commissions for motets, oratorios, and other significant choral works. In 1969 she founded Kammerchor Blan-



Source: *Archiv Frau und Musik, Signatur NL-FK-1*
Heirs of Felicitas Kukuck. Open access.
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kenese, a choir that often premiered and performed her music and which, in a different configuration, still exists today. From 1971 to 1981 she taught music at the Lola Rogge Dance School in Hamburg, where she composed pieces for performances and her students' final exams.

The 1980s saw a burgeoning peace movement that spread across Europe, with fierce commitment from people in Germany. Kukuck joined this movement, and soon after, began to address themes of war and peace in her music. Many of her larger works are from this era, including the church opera *Der Mann*

Mose [The Man Moses], the cantata *De Profundis*, and many smaller chamber music pieces. One of her largest works, a requiem titled *Und es war: Hiroshima. Eine Collage über Anfang und Ende der Schöpfung* [And It Was: Hiroshima. A collage about the beginning and end of creation] premiered in 1995 during World Peace Week in the ruins of Hamburg's historic Saint Nicholas church. The same year saw the premiere of the cantata *Wer war Nikolaus von Myra? Wie ein Bischof seine Stadt aus der Hungersnot rettete und vor Krieg bewahrte* [Who was Nicholas of Myra? How a Bishop Saved his City from Famine and Protected it from War], as well as three motets and one more cantata.

Kukuck composed daily until her death in 2001. She wrote over one thousand works—primarily vocal and choral pieces—for musicians at all levels. It is rare for a composer to be effective at writing for such a wide range of abilities and to take pride in all of it. Margaret recalls her mother saying that it was easier to write complex music and harder to write simple music. Felicitas wanted "only the best"⁸ for children who were studying music and, with four children at home and

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supportive colleagues, she had a good sense of what worked.

Felicitas Kukuck's music is mostly performed in Germany by community and church choirs, and is rarely heard outside the country. In 2014, over thirty concerts across Germany marked the centenary of her death, and her name remains among the prominent German composers of the twentieth century. Most of the information about her life and work is in German, although relatively well documented thanks to the efforts of her daughter and organizations such as the Archiv Frau & Musik, which now holds the rights to Kukuck's estate. The quality, adaptability, and content of her body of work will be of particular interest to musicians working in Christian churches, although the collections of canons and folk songs—if one can track them down—will provide rich material for those working with young and developing musicians.

Selected Works of Felicitas Kukuck

Es führt über den Main [It Crosses the Main] (1952)
Available in numerous arrangements

Of the more than one thousand pieces Kukuck wrote, it is her arrangement of this medieval *Totentanz* folk song for which she is best known. *Totentanz* songs are part of the medieval fascination with death and dance (also known as *danse macabre*) that appears in visual art, literature, and music of this era. The text of *Es führt über den Main*, authorship unknown, tells of how people dance when they cross a bridge over the Main River. Everyone—from a shoeless fellow, a young woman, and even a king—must dance as they cross the bridge, a metaphor for death. In the context of German Protestantism, the idea of dancing to one's death could be understood as finding joy in anticipation of one's own personal resurrection. It could also be a reminder to live one's life well, since death comes for everyone in the end, often without warning.

Whatever its original meaning, this folk song has been passed down for generations as part of Germany's extensive folk song tradition. In 1952, Felicitas Kukuck wrote an arrangement of the song for school

and community music publications and added two additional stanzas. Kukuck's stanzas continue the tale of the bridge: it gets destroyed by all the people in the land, who dance as they swing their axes. In Kukuck's version, the song ends with people coming together and holding hands as they dance "ohne Ende," or without end. It could be that she wanted a stronger ending for a song children would sing in school, or to contribute to a sense of unity among children after so many years of war in Germany.

Whatever the case, the additional stanzas have become the definitive version of this old folk song. The singable melody is built like a bridge, with gentle ascending stepwise notes, lingering a moment an octave above where it began, and descending gracefully on the text "fa la la la." It moves from minor to major and back to minor again. When Kukuck sings it in an old recording, her vocal tone and tempo vary to reflect the parts of the story.⁹

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Storm-Lieder [Storm Songs] (1952, 1985)
Möseler Verlag

There are two volumes of these delightful part songs that set the texts of nineteenth-century German poet Theodor Storm. Unaccompanied and set for mixed choir, the texts are largely secular and make frequent reference to the natural world. Homophony prioritizes clarity of the text, mixed meters indicate word stress, and occasional, often unprepared, chromaticism illuminates deeper meaning contained within Storm's poetry. These pieces may be more suitable for experienced choirs.

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Das kommende Reich [The Kingdom to Come]
(1953)
Carus Verlag

Written for mixed choir, orchestra, baritone and organ, this seventy-minute setting of the Beatitudes is an example of Kukuck's belief that music for less-experienced musicians must also be of high quality. The choral parts in this score are sometimes for two parts only or written

in unison or octaves, and are frequently supported by orchestration. People comfortable with German can sing the parts written specifically for the “Gemeinde,” or congregation. Otherwise, these parts can be done by the full choir or even a smaller subset of singers. The baritone solo is accompanied by two flutes who are sometimes in octaves with the soloist, and at other times filling in harmonies in modest ways, perhaps recalling the “halo effect” used by Johann Sebastian Bach centuries prior.

Die Weihnachtsgeschichte in Liedern
[The Christmas Story in Songs] (1973)
Möseler Verlag

This collection of seven pieces for mixed choir (and soloists, when available) was printed in 1973. Each piece recounts part of the Christmas Story. In Kukuck’s time, it was common to have Christmas celebrations in public schools as well as church, and these pieces would suit both occasions. They vary in mood and tempo, providing opportunities for creating dramatic interest. Three different places in the score indicate that the congregation could sing a hymn or carol that pairs with the part of the story outlined in the song. The writing is accessible and can be adapted for different voicings and instrumentation as needed.

Ecce Homo: Die letzten Tage des Jesus aus Galiläa [Behold the Man: The Last Days of Jesus of Galilee] (1990)
Möseler Verlag

This ambitious work was written in 1990 for mixed choir, vocal soloists, and an ensemble consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, alto and tenor recorders, percussion, saxophones, trombone, string quartet and organ (or synthesizer). The structure recalls the Passions of J. S. Bach, with soloist roles for Narrator (similar to Bach’s Evangelist), Jesus, Judas, Petrus, Kaiphas, and Pilate; a choir singing the role of the People (like Bach’s turba choruses) and reflective chorales; and groupings of notes signifying crosses throughout the piece. Margaret Johannsen compiled Bible verses and added her

own writing to create the libretto. While not strictly atonal or twelve tone, this oratorio is full of chromaticism. The singers are often, but not always, doubled by one or more instruments. Recitative-like material is notated and metered yet retains a speech-like feel.

The oratorio almost ends with Jesus on the cross and the earth rumbling. At that point, an unexpected epilogue opens on a train station in Danzig, Poland, in August of 1942. The brief scene is based on the real story of Janusz Korczak, a Polish children’s book author, child advocate, and director of an orphanage. When given the opportunity to escape, Korczak refused to leave the nearly two hundred children in his care and boarded the train to Treblinka concentration camp with them. The soloist who sang Jesus in the first part of the oratorio now sings the part of Korczak. The final words of the oratorio are “I am not guilty,” sung by the soloist who previously sang the role of Pilate and now assumes the role of the soldier who offered to help Korczak escape.

Und es ward: Hiroshima. Eine Collage über Anfang und Ende der Schöpfung [And it Was: Hiroshima. A Collage About the Beginning and End of Creation] (1995)
Möseler Verlag

This oratorio was written for mixed choir, organ and/or woodwinds, percussion, and soprano and tenor soloists. Despite living through so much war, Kukuck didn’t address it as a theme in her music until sometime in the 1980s when she joined Germany’s burgeoning anti-war movement. This difficult and powerful piece explores the tragedy of the bombing of Hiroshima through texts from the Bible, poetry written by Hiroshima survivor Mitsue Furuta, and additional texts by Kukuck’s daughter. The forty-five-minute-long work features unaccompanied chorus with arias and recitatives accompanied by the organ and/or woodwind instruments, and percussion. Many of the choruses will be accessible for church or community ensembles; there are, however, moments of rhythmic and harmonic complexity that merit careful attention and may be better suited for more experienced ensembles.

Conclusion

It is difficult to suggest only a few pieces from Kukuck's rich catalogue of choral music, particularly as so much of her work would be useful for a wide range of ensembles. Her style is emblematic of most twentieth-century German vocal music: expansive and singable melodies are mixed with unusual intervals and chromaticism. Her overall harmonic language can be considered tonal, although there are deviations from tonality in her more complex and later works. The architecture of each piece is clear, and the text—always in German—guides the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and metric setting. Some of her scores are easily accessible, while others will require correspondence with the publisher to obtain. A full list of published works and publishers is on the website www.felicitaskukuck.de.

The oft-heralded composer Paul Hindemith certainly had a profound impact on Kukuck's development as a composer. Yet even cursory study of her work cements her place in the lineage of fine German composers in her own right. Her dedication to music education and writing thoughtfully crafted music to suit a range of abilities distinguishes her music from that of many of her contemporaries. Whether selecting from the more complex pieces, her church motets and cantatas, her part songs, or even folk song settings, the work of Felicitas Kukuck provides an illuminating window into music in the German classical tradition during some of the country's most turbulent and transformational years. 

Additional Resources

Bick, Martina. "Felicitas Kukuck,"
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Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.digitales-deutsches-frauenarchiv.de/akteurinnen/felicitas-kukuck>

Johannsen, Margret. "Felicitas Kukuck,"
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Accessed March 2, 2025. https://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/receive/mugi_person_00000459?lang=de

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Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1991.

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"Reichskulturkammer and Reichsmusikkammer."
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NOTES

¹ Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form eines Tagebuchs ab 17. April 1989," 7, https://felicitaskukuck.de/Autobiographie_FKukuck.pdf

² Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form."

³ Felicitas Kukuck, "Autobiographie in Form," 10.

⁴ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard, Hamburger Musikhochschule, July 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcu6RUXy608>

⁵ Cordula Sprenger, *Felicitas Kukuck als Komponistin von Solo- und Chorliedern* (Tectum Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008), 17.

⁶ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard.

⁷ Eicke Funck, "Eicke Funck im Gespräch mit Felicitas Kukuck," *Intervalle I*, Arbeitskreis Musik in der Jugend (Wolfenbüttel, 1980), 13.

⁸ Margret Johannsen, interview by Beatrix Borchard.

⁹ "Musik zum Reinhören," https://felicitaskukuck.de/musik_hoeren.htm.

A Bigger Table Music Reviews

Choral Reviews

‘Akahi Ho‘i

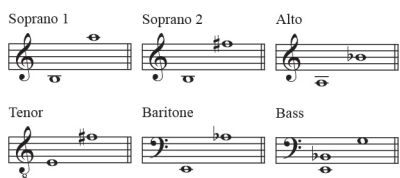
Music by King David Kalākaua

arr. Megann Sala (b. 1991)

Text adapted from Nina Keali‘iwahamana (b. 1936)

SSATBB (2:30)

Pavane Publishing



This arrangement for choir from Megann Sala harkens back to a beautiful version of the song for solo voice and orchestra by Jack de Mello, which was recorded by Nina Keali‘iwahamana and Emma Veary. The original work was composed by King David Kalākaua (1836–1891), the last reigning king of Hawai‘i. He was educated in music performance and composition along with his three siblings. The four siblings became known as Nā Lani ‘Ehā (the royal/heavenly four). Often called the Merrie Monarch, King David Kalākaua was a proponent of reintegrating hula into the public eye.

This arrangement is a wonderful introduction to the music of Nā Lani ‘Ehā and Hawaiian choral music for ensembles in high school, collegiate, or community set-

tings. The melody and text are broken up into portions of homophony and section soli, making pronunciation easy to monitor during rehearsal. Pavane offers a diction guide on their website, and the link is included in the score. “Loo” and “doom” are used as accompaniment in voice parts without text. There is limited division for basses and sopranos, and it only occurs when these voices are acting as accompaniment. The lowest basses go below the staff and highest sopranos go above the staff in only one measure each. This arrangement is representative of other unaccompanied Hawaiian choral works, and more information can be found in Sala’s forthcoming DMA document on arrangements by Dorothy Kahananui Gillett. More textual information for this and many other Hawaiian works can be found on the online resource, Huapala.org.

Keenan Elijah Dolan, DMA
University of Arizona

Maria Magdalena et altera Maria

(from *Motetti Spirituali*, 1619)

Sulpitia Lodovica Cesis

ed. Xinke Shen

SA (2:30)

Voces Feminae VF-006



This short, graceful work was composed by the Italian composer, lute player, and nun Sulpitia Lodovica

Cesis (1577–after 1619). As a nun composer, Cesis found creative ways to evade strict church rules, even using instruments like the cornett and trombone in her music. In 1619 she published *Motetti Spirituali*, a collection of motets for two to twelve voices. “Maria Magdalena et altera Maria” is a small-scale, unaccompanied duet from this publication and is one of the shortest pieces in the collection. The piece celebrates Easter, and the text is in Latin from Matthew 28:1, 6–7.

Translation:

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary
went to the place of the sepulcher.

“Jesus, whom you seek, is not here:

He is risen, as he said.

He goes before you into Galilee:
there shall ye see him.”

The piece is set in three sections in ABB form. The first section focuses on the story’s female characters: Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary, and also sets the scene at the empty tomb. The second section quotes the words of the angel. The last section repeats the second section, including the same music and the text. The piece concludes with a brief coda in which the final notes are prolonged, creating a strong sense of closure and rest. The two voices alternate between imitation and homophony. The text-setting is mostly syllabic, with a few melismatic moments in the soprano. This elegant duet requires sopranos with flexibility for the melismas and is a good choice for treble choirs (including college, adult, high school and advanced middle school), especially for those with a small number of singers. Doubling of the vocal parts by instruments—such as flutes or recorders, or adding chordal support with an organ—would be appropriate and can help support the singers. The work was originally composed for cantus and bassus. For this edition, the pitch has been transposed up the interval of a minor third to accommodate two treble voices.

Xinke Shen

MM student

University of Arizona

Thus Spake the Mother

Melissa Dunphy

Text by Sri Ananda

Mormolyke Press, 2024

SSA unaccompanied (3:30)



Melissa Dunphy sets the powerful words of Indian poet, mystic, and philosopher Sri Ananda in *Thus Spake the Mother*. Ananda’s text comes from his 1919 collection *Snow-Birds*, written during his first few years in Norway, where he lived for the latter part of his life. Ananda is credited with being one of the first to bring Indian philosophy and teachings to Europe. Dunphy’s setting is accessible in its part-writing and singable melodic lines but provides a challenge in the weaving of textures and modal harmonies, making it appropriate for collegiate, community or advanced high school treble ensembles.

“Thus Spake the Mother” is set in three sections that transition through tonal centers to highlight the meaning of the text. The first section, set in C mixolydian, begins with a fanfare-like motive of “Forward!” and forward motion is achieved through alternating antiphonal and homophonic passages. In the second section, the text changes from declamatory for “cross the ditches, break the hedges, and march” to a more nebulous setting of “seize the secret of the lightless sea, scan and control what mighty powers lie hidden in the soul’s unfathomed depths.” In this section, Dunphy keeps the motives from the first section but uses modal and tonal shifts to depict the ambiguity of the text. While these shifting centers can be complex, Dunphy’s voice leading makes the transitions seamless through predominantly half-step motion.

The moral of the story is set in the third section, in which the “Mother” reveals the purpose of her demands. She states, “Nature will bring her long-saved

treasures to serve and nurture you, but you shall lead Humanity by the hand with gentle, ceaseless, sweet, unmasking love.” Dunphy forgoes modal mixture in this section, setting it as a musical embrace in B^b major, and with a tempo that gradually slows to the piece’s conclusion. The alternating textures now take on the character of a rocking, comforting lullaby. The three voices arrive at the final fermata at different times on the text “by the hand,” as if they are grasping each other’s hands.

“Thus Spake the Mother” is a brilliant embodiment of the many aspects of Mother: powerful, commanding, mysterious, and nurturing. This piece is as accessible as it is expressive and has layers of meaning that can engage treble singers in rehearsal and performance.

Angelica Dunsavage, DMA
Artistic Director
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Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco

Musique à la Cité des Rois/Music in the City of Kings
Musica per le monache di San Vito/Music for the
Nuns of San Vito

Coro de Niños Cantores de Córdoba
Ensemble Elyma
Gabriel Garrido, director
Phaia Music K617035 (1993; 46:29)

Ensemble Elyma captures the essence of Baroque composer Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco (1644–1728) in this outstanding recording. Torrejón y Velasco emigrated to Peru and was the maestro at Lima Cathedral for much of his life. He composed the first opera written in

the Americas (*La púrpura de la rosa*) in 1701. His works on this recording fall into two categories. The first five pieces are villancicos (with Spanish text) for two to four voice parts and basso continuo. The final four are in Latin, and include Psalm settings (“Nisi Dominus” and “Dixit Dominus”), a Lamentation, and a mass for six voices. These pieces feature larger vocal forces: three to ten voices.

One of the hallmarks of Torrejón y Velasco’s style is his jaunty, dancelike rhythms, which permeate his villancicos and the Latin sacred works. Repeated rhythmic motifs give cohesion and momentum. Typically, the villancicos alternate between *estribillo* (refrain) and *coplas* (verses), which usually contrast in voicing and character. In all the works, textures alternate frequently between polyphony and declamatory homophony and harken back to the styles of early Baroque Italian composers such as Monteverdi.

Ensemble Elyma is a mixed ensemble founded in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1981 by Argentinian conductor Gabriel Garrido. The focus of the group is the music of Monteverdi and Baroque composers of the Americas, and their ensemble typically features four to sixteen singers and seven instrumentalists. Performance practice dictates that the music can be augmented with a variety of instruments, and Ensemble Elyma makes imaginative choices in this regard, utilizing guitars, organ, flutes, and brass instruments to support the vocal parts. The recording also features Coro de Niños de Córdoba, a now-defunct children’s ensemble based in Argentina. This group joins Ensemble Elyma on six of the nine pieces. The performances are riveting and contribute to a thoroughly enjoyable listening experience.

CJ Madsen, DMA
Adjunct Faculty, School of Music
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Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

JORDAN M. SHOMPER

Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a contemporary social justice work that charts an emotional journey from fear to hope in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Structured in five powerful movements, the cantata leads listeners from anxiety and uncertainty in "Fear," through the inward reflection of "The Prayer" and "Breathe," to the renewed optimism of "The Resolve" and "Hope." Geter recontextualizes elements from historical works and combines them with contemporary secular poetry to create a piece that connects time periods and communities. Scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers (SATB quartet), cello, and vocal soloist,¹ *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a technically compelling work and a powerful expression of resilience and transformation that merits further study and performance.

Biography

Damien Geter is a multi-faceted artist. A successful opera singer, music director, conductor, artistic advisor, actor, author, teacher, and composer, he also owns his own publishing company. He has served on the music faculty at The Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon, and co-authored the book *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Socio-political Lens* with Merrin Guice.² Currently he works as music

director of Portland Opera. Geter's works have been performed by renowned orchestras, choirs, and other musical organizations throughout the United States. To date, his oeuvre includes over two dozen works in the following genres: chamber, large-scale instrumental, small-scale vocal, operatic, and choral.

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow

The cantata was commissioned by Eugene Rogers and The Washington Chorus in 2020, in part to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the chorus and Rogers's first concert as director. The Chorus opened its 2020 fall season virtually by streaming a twenty-three-minute short film created by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Bob Berg, which featured *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, The Washington Chorus, soprano Aundi Marie Moore, and cellist Seth Parker Woods.³ Since its premiere, the cantata has been programmed by many notable organizations and university choirs.

Geter's work focuses on COVID-19, specifically the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black Americans. The composer summarized his approach, saying, "It is a fact that the pandemic has touched the Black community in a much more aggressive manner than other communities. To highlight this atrocity, I chose to

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pay homage to the ancestors and Black Americans by incorporating spirituals in this cantata.”⁴ The text captures the emotional and psychological landscape of this historic moment while also providing a message of hope for the future.

Geter uses form, texture, harmony, and text-painting to portray the emotional character of each movement. Additionally, he recontextualizes historical elements—including Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12; the spirituals “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me” and “There is a Balm in Gilead”; and the Charles Albert Tindley hymn “We’ll Understand It Better By and By,” and combines them with poetry of Megan Levad, Aminata Sei, and Walt Whitman to bridge past and present struggles. Megan Levad is a poet, librettist, professor, and author of the books *Why We Live in the Dark Ages*⁵ and *What Have I to Say to You*.⁶ Aminata Sei is a writer and social justice advocate whose work explores themes of resilience, equity, and cultural identity. Walt Whitman was an American poet, essayist, and journalist, celebrated for creating a style of free verse that included “oratorical rhythms and chanted lists of American places, names, and objects.”⁷

The title of each movement represents a state of being or an action that occurs during times of difficulty. Fear is a natural response to hardship and is often manifested physically as well as emotionally. Prayer is a practice embraced across religions and is a way to seek comfort and guidance in the face of adversity. Breathing is an important component of many meditation practices and can mitigate anxiety by calming the body and mind. Resolve refers to a firm determination to act. Hope is the belief that despite difficulties, a positive outcome is possible. It can lead to a sense of peace and optimism. The journey from fear to hope is amplified in numerous ways throughout the work, specifically through harmony, tempo, and the organization of texts (Table 1).

I. Fear

The first movement is set in a large, two-part form with an introduction and a coda and features the sacred poetry of Salomo Franck and the secular poetry of Megan Levad (Table 2 on the next page).

Geter sets the first three of four lines in Franck’s text, drawing from the second movement of BWV 12. Levad’s text comprises eight stanzas in free verse. In the

Table 1. Overview of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

	I. Fear	II. The Prayer	III. Breathe	IV. The Resolve	V. Hope
Text Sources	Salomo Franck and Megan Levad	Traditional spiritual, “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me”	Aminata Sei	Traditional spiritual, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” and hymn, “By and By”	Walt Whitman
Key areas	Fm	Fm	D Dorian → C	Eb	Ab
Tempo Range	60 bpm	56-65 bpm	55-70 bpm	55-72 bpm	70-100 bpm
Overall message	Fear and Struggle	Yearning for Comfort	Perseverance	Healing	Transformation

first stanza, Levad references humanity's attempts to tame forces of nature: "the fire, the flood, the mountain, and its bear." She includes a directive to "look everywhere" for these potential threats, emphasizing the constant awareness required to navigate life's challenges. Levad suggests that instead of looking outward for dangers, people should look inward for calm and strength. Persistence is another central theme of her poem, and it is underscored by the lines "we are born to trouble, we are built for trouble." This suggests that although challenges are intrinsic to the human experience, people can overcome them. The theme of persistence emerges again in the lines "we seek, we seek, we seek and reach" from the third stanza. The repetition of the word "seek" suggests the necessity of continued action to navigate difficulties.

In the introduction, Geter employs parody technique, borrowing the texture of the second movement of BWV 12 from the beginning through m. 44. There are three differences between Bach's setting and the parody. First, the second viola part is omitted. Second, Bach's continuo line is set for solo cello. Third, the chamber singer parts are arrangements of Bach's other instrumental

parts, excluding the second viola (soprano – violin 1, alto – violin 2, tenor – viola 1, and bass – bassoon). The SATB choral parts are the same in both works. Geter also sets Franck's text in the chamber singer parts, even though they are derived from instrumental parts. The text of the chamber singer parts corresponds to the text in the choir in any given section throughout the introduction. The syllables of each word are separated with a rest, which creates a feeling of breathlessness (Figure 1 on the next page).

Bach's setting features a four-bar *lamento basso* pattern that appears twelve times. Geter sets the figure eleven times in the introduction, cadencing after the eleventh iteration. The *lamento basso* is featured in each of the five movements of the cantata, creating thematic unity, although it is often transformed (transposed, inverted, in retrograde, etc.).

The A section opens with a two-measure passage for solo cello, while the voices whisper "fear," a textual addition, corresponding with the title of the movement. There are a variety of textures in the A section, including contrapuntally enlivened homophony, paired

Table 2. Musical overview of "Fear"

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	Coda
Measures	1-45	46-62	63-73	74-85	86-94	95-97
Stanzas	Franck text	Levad 1-2, "Fear"	Levad 3-4	Levad 5-6	Levad 7-8 (lines 1-2)	Levad 8 (lines 3-4)
Forces	SATB choir, chamber singers, cello	SATB choir (<i>divisi</i>), cello				
Meter	3/2	2/2	2/2, 3/4	2/2, 4/4, 6/4	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Lento, H=60			Sostenuto, Q=60, H=60		Q=60

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voicings, and canonic writing. The frequent change of texture contributes to a sense of anxiety throughout the movement.

Text-painting is another important compositional approach that is employed to great effect in this movement. Where the text references floods and mountains, the bass is juxtaposed in its low range and the soprano in its upper range, painting the images referenced in the text. The words “we seek and reach” are set in sequential, cascading long notes, representing the persistence necessary to reach the desired outcome. Consecutive quarter-note triplets convey the dragging nature of the

“long day.”

Geter draws particular attention to two lines of text. At “the closest breath,” the composer indicates a *ritardando*, giving special attention to its reference to the transmission of COVID-19. In the last few measures of the movement, he highlights the text “and try and dream,” set in the altos alone, and ends the movement with a C major chord, foreshadowing the hope later in the work.

II. The Prayer

“The Prayer” is scored for SSAATTBB choir, soloist, and cello and is set in theme and variations form with

Lente ♩ = 60

The musical score is for Movement 1, "Fear," measures 1-5. It is in 3/2 time, key of B-flat major (three flats), and tempo Lente (♩ = 60). The score is for a chamber choir (Sop. Solo, Alto Solo, Ten. Solo, Bass Solo) and a full choir (S, A, T, B). The dynamics range from *mp* (mezzo-piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The lyrics are: "Wei - nen, Kla - gen, Sor - gen, Za - gen, Wei - nen, Kla - gen, Sor - gen, Wei - Za - gen,". The Soprano Soloist and Alto Soloist parts are marked *mp*. The Tenor Soloist and Bass Soloist parts are marked *mp*. The Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts of the Chorus are marked *mf*. The Cello part is marked *mf*.

Figure 1. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 1, “Fear,” mm. 1–5.

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four sections (Table 3).

The second movement of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* features the tune and the text of the spiritual “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me.” In the text, the speaker expresses a desire for Jesus’s presence throughout their life, which they describe as a “pilgrim journey.” The speaker asks for Jesus during moments of profound hardship, when their emotional burden becomes overwhelming, with the words, “In my trials, Lord, walk with me.” In the context of the cantata, the inclusion of this spiritual represents the profound struggles people faced during 2020, particularly early in the pandemic when death tolls and hospitalizations were rapidly rising and governmental lockdowns were occurring. Geter explains: “This spiritual was on my heart at the time.... I kept singing it...before I had even been asked to write the piece.”⁸

Section A begins with the soloist (Geter calls this “the voice of hope”⁹) singing the melody with embellishments. The choral parts have short, improvisatory phrases with fragmented or reordered text. By setting the music in this way, Geter emulates the church music of his youth while also intensifying the feeling of yearning.¹⁰

In Section C, the tenors and basses sing an ostinato pattern, repeating the phrase, “Walk with me.” The tenor and bass 1 parts interject “Please walk with me”; the bass 2 part remains consistent throughout. The melodic line moves to the soprano 1 part, while the so-

prano 2 and alto parts harmonize homophonically. The melodic phrases are separated with rests, evoking a feeling of breathlessness reminiscent of the first movement.

The movement features varied textures, including non-imitative polyphony, duets, and trios in Sections A and B, homophonic and contrapuntal textures in Section C, and quarter-note ostinatos that are contrasted with sustained whole notes in Section D. Unlike the first movement, in which frequent textural shifts evoke anxiety, the changes in this movement express a deep yearning and desire for comfort and represent numerous prayers happening simultaneously, reflecting the central theme of “The Prayer.”

III. Breathe

“Breathe” is scored for SSAATTBB choir and cello, and the movement is set in modified rondo form with four main sections (Table 4 on the next page).

It features the text of Aminata Sei’s poem of the same name. The poem comprises four stanzas and is set in free verse. Although some stanzas have slant rhymes (words that have similar—but not identical—sounds), Sei shares, “I can’t really say [I] took into account rhyme or any conventional use of literary devices. I just wrote then what sounded good to me.”¹¹ The final line in each stanza concludes with the word “breathe,” creating a sense of thematic unity and structural symmetry.

The text begins with a feeling of simplicity for the text “no complex expectations.” Here, the directive is

Table 3. Musical overview of “The Prayer”

	A (Theme)	B (Variation 1)	C (Variation 2)	D (Variation 3)
Measures	1-15	16-32	33-52	53-63
Stanza	1	2	1	1 fragmented
Meter	4/4	4/4, 2/4	3/4	4/4, 3/4
Tempo	Q=65		Pesante, Q=56	

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"Just breathe." The tone changes in the second stanza as "disruptions" make even the natural act of breathing difficult: "Now we don't know how to breathe." The third stanza reflects a loss of confidence and hope with the words, "shaken" and "stirred"; however, Sei encourages the reader: "We must continue to breathe." The final stanza urges the reader to turn inward to regain a sense of peace. The final line recalls the end of the first stanza, "Learn again to just breathe." Sei uses "breathe" in a literal way but also as a metaphor for finding balance and strength during difficult times.

Musically, Geter begins this movement with a four-measure passage for solo cello followed by staggered vocal entrances, with multiple repetitions of "Just breathe." The repeated figures evoke calming self-talk. The melody enters but is obscured by the simultaneous polyphony. At the climax of the B section, Geter repeats the text, "don't know how to breathe," setting it homophonically as duplets in compound meter, and culminates the phrase with a cluster chord, underscoring the anxiety expressed in the text (Figure 2 on the next page).

Geter uses various compositional techniques throughout the movement to illustrate the text. In the A sections, he employs two extended techniques in the cello part: *tonlos* and harmonics, *sul D*. *Tonlos*, described

by Geter in the score, is playing, "On the bridge, creating a breathy, non-pitched effect," representing the struggle for breath one might experience when stricken with COVID-19. Harmonics, set in a steady, repeated pattern, evoke the sound of a hospital monitor.

Most of the movement is set in the Dorian mode, and Geter frequently employs dissonance as well as high vocal registers to create a feeling of anxiety. The vocal lines in various combinations clash at the interval of a second (sometimes displaced by an octave). The soprano 1 part remains in a high register, often around D5–F5. Geter further illustrates the text with moments of word painting, such as "shaken" and "stirred," which he sets with rapid sixteenth-note triplets.

In Section D, the key changes to C major, reflecting the more hopeful text of the final stanza. Here, Geter uses more traditional triadic harmonies and employs a more conventional chord progression, suggesting stability. The concluding A' section features long, melismatic soprano lines that oscillate between C and D and create a feeling of suspension. Although this final section is in the key of C, the movement ends with a sustained G pitch in the altos and the cello, again employing *tonlos*. By ending the movement this way, the composer captures both glimpses of hope and the lingering uncertainty that characterize this middle movement.

Table 4. Musical overview of "Breathe"

	A	B	A'	C	D	A''
Measures	1-23	24-35	36-43	44-60	61-77	78-94
Stanza	1	2	1 (line 4)	3 & 2 (line 4)	4	1 (line 4)
Key	D Dorian				C major	
Meter	2/4	6/8	2/4	2/4, 4/4, 4/8, 2/8	4/4, 2/4	3/4, 4/4
Tempo	Q=55	DQ=70	Q=55	Q=70	Q=62	

IV. The Resolve

Like the second movement, “The Resolve” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers, soloist, and cello. The movement features an introduction and a coda, with the majority of the movement made up of the melodies from “There is a Balm in Gilead.” The spiritual is set in the traditional verse-refrain form, beginning with the refrain, with a repeat of the refrain after the second verse. Geter sets the refrain of “By and By” in the transitional section before the coda (Table 5 on the next page).

The text of “There is a Balm in Gilead” has numerous references to healing. This healing is not just for

physical wounds but also for deeper emotional and spiritual pain. The overall message is that, despite struggle and hardship, healing can be found in the holy spirit and the support of others. Geter notes, “I can’t think of any other spiritual that...talks about the trajectory of going from fear and despair to hope.... There’s something that’s going to help soothe your soul.”¹²

Tindley’s hymn text includes four verses, each with the same refrain. Only the refrain text and tune are used in this work. Geter changes Tindley’s second line from “All the saints of God are gathered home” to “All of us are here together as one,” which allows the message in the hymn to be universal. In “By and By,” the

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S cer - tain - ty e-merge we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

A don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

A Now we don't know how to breathe. We don't know how to breathe.

A tain - ty Now we don't know how to breathe. We don't know how to breathe.

T merge... we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

T cer - tain - ty, we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

B Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

B merge Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

Vlc.

Figure 2. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 3, “Breathe,” mm. 31–35.

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speaker looks forward to a future time of unity and clarity. In the context of this work, the line “when the morning comes” symbolizes optimism and new beginnings. Geter comments that the text in “By and By” does not shy away from “the fact that we went through [the events of 2020], but also...[recognizes] that we did get through this and understand the reasons why this happened later.”¹³

In this movement, Geter allows the spiritual and hymn to speak for themselves, presenting each separately before returning to the peace of “There is a Balm in Gilead” in the coda. While he incorporates modern harmonic language, the composer remains faithful to the mode, melody, phrase lengths, rhythm, and texts of the source materials. One exception to the authentic treatment is his inclusion of cello in a traditionally unaccompanied genre. The cello plays continuously throughout the refrains and verses, often with

legato eighth-note passages, providing harmonic support. The cello writing in this movement is notably the most lyrical in the cantata so far, marking a significant shift toward a more hopeful tone.

In the first refrain, the altos sing the melody, while the other choral parts harmonize with the full text or text fragments in contrapuntally enlivened homophony. For the second refrain, the soloist joins the altos on the melody and has a sixteenth-note embellishment on the word “balm.”¹⁴ The third refrain is closely related to the first two but has more variation. The fourth refrain is different from the first three in several ways: the melody returns to the soloist while the chamber singers replace the choir and harmonize polyphonically at a *mezzo piano*; the harmonization is more dissonant for the chamber singers, with reverse pedal tones in the soprano line. In addition, the *lamento basso* returns in the tenor line. Geter also acknowledges the structure

Table 5. Musical overview of “The Resolve”

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	A''	A'''	C	C'	Coda
Source Materials		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 1	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 2	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	By and By Refrain		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain fragment
Measures	1-4	5-12	13-20	5-12 repeat	13-20 repeat	21-28	29-35	36-51	36-55	56-62
Forces	SATB choir, cello		SATB choir, solo, cello				Chamber singers, cello	SATB choir, cello	SATB choir, CS, cello	SATB choir, CS (SA), cello
Meter	3/4	4/4						2/2	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Q=72						Q=65	Joyously, with light swing; No swing (same tempo)		Q=55

of the traditional spiritual in the verses by setting two lines of text over four measures, while incorporating a respectful treatment of the melody with only one embellishment on the word, “Spirit” (“knowledge” in the repeat). The choir sings on “Oo” and then finishes with the latter portion of text for each line, often the final word, amplifying the main part of the message. In the final lines of the first two verses, all vocal parts have the full text in a predominantly homophonic texture, suggesting unity.

“By and By” is marked “Joyously, with light swing.” Geter sets the tone for this section with syncopated eighth-note figures in the cello. He assigns the melody to the soprano and bass choral voices and indicates that the soloist should improvise while the altos and tenors sing accompaniment material, often repeating fragments of the text (Figure 3).

At the first ending, the chamber singers interject, “And by and by, oh,” Geter’s addition to the text. In the repeat of this section, the chamber singers have high, *forte* interjections, evoking excitement. The chamber singers are often offset from the choral parts in an improvisatory style. Geter notes that he consciously

included the spontaneous-sounding figures: “This is a song that we sang at church as a kid.... I remember all the inflections that people used to throw in there and everything, [and] some of them are in the piece.”¹⁵

The movement ends peacefully. The soloist sings the first half of the first phrase of “There is a Balm in Gilead,” sustaining the final note for three measures. The phrase fragments further in the soprano and alto chamber voices, repeating the text and motive, “There is a balm.” The sustained notes and gentle repetition suggest that the balm remains within reach but is not yet fully realized. This conclusion reinforces the cantata’s broader themes of resilience and the journey toward hope.

V. Hope

After four movements of tension and reflection, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* comes to its final moments in the aptly titled movement, “Hope.” Like movements two and four, “Hope” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, soloist, and cello. It has an ABA’ form with an introduction and coda (Table 6 on the next page).

The musical score for Figure 3 shows measures 36-38 of Movement 4, "The Resolve," from *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Cello (Vlc.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo/mood marking is *mf* (2nd time *f*). The lyrics are: "By and by, oh, when the morn-ing comes." The Soprano and Bass parts have a melody, while the Alto and Tenor parts have accompaniment. The Cello part has a syncopated eighth-note figure.

Figure 3. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 4, “The Resolve,” mm. 36–38.

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This movement features the poem "Continuities" by Walt Whitman.¹⁶ Whitman uses natural imagery, including aging bodies, dimming light, the sun's rise and fall, and the return of spring. This imagery helps to convey the theme of renewal and transformation that permeates this movement.

In this poem, the speaker reflects on the enduring nature of life, emphasizing that "nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost." This assertion highlights the belief in continual existence, even when appearances change or circumstances shift. Whitman describes time, space, and "the fields of Nature" as "ample," meaning that each is vast and offers the possibility of transformation and regeneration. The references to the aging body, "sluggish, aged, cold," and the dimming "light in the eye" speak about the natural progression of life, including Whitman's belief that these life forms will "duly flame again." This cyclical view of life is further affirmed in the imagery of the rising sun and the return of spring, bringing "grass and flowers and summer fruits and corn." In the context of this work, the poem suggests that although COVID-19 caused significant loss, renewal will follow and transformation is inevitable.

The first two lines of the poem are presented in the introduction, sung by the sopranos and altos in homophony. Here, the cello line evokes a dream-like quality, oscillating between an A^b and B^b in a continuous

sixteenth-note figure. The tenors are introduced high in their range in measure three, creating a light texture with the three upper voices for the hopeful text. The basses enter in the A section.

As the tempo quickens to 100 bpm in Section A, Geter revisits the opening lines of the poem, reinforcing the main message that "nothing is ever really lost." The melody is in the solo voice and the choral parts accompany it in lively, syncopated rhythms, often in eighth-note figures. The compositional approach is similar to that in the other movements. Text fragments are set in the lower choral voices, which later join the soloist to amplify the main message of the text. In this movement, the cello is treated as one of the choral voices, setting it largely in the same rhythm, which contributes to a feeling of unity. The harmonic language in this section predominantly features major chords, which sound particularly hopeful in contrast to the dissonant and extended chords used throughout much of the rest of the work.

In Section B, Geter musically highlights the stark imagery in lines six through eight of the poem. He uses a melodic major seventh interval in the soprano line, harmonized with dissonant chords to paint the harsh reality of the aging body and the dimming of life's light. Beneath this, the cello part stirs uneasily with tumultuous sixteenth notes, in stark contrast to its earlier dream-like oscillations. The composer recalls the

Table 6. Musical overview of "Hope"

	Intro	A	B	A'	Coda
Measures	1-6	7-26	27-47	48-56	57-61
Lines of Text	1-2	1-5	6-8	1, 9-10, "Hope"	1
Meter	4/4		4/4, 3/4	4/4	
Tempo	Tranquillo Q=75	Hopeful Q=100	Slightly slower Q=75, Q=100, Q=75	Q=75	Q=70

lamento basso in the bass part on the lines, “the embers left from earlier fires.” The final phrase of Section B builds to *fortissimo* at the word “rises” on a powerful tonic chord that spans four octaves, which affirms an optimistic future. The ascending melodic line and the repeated word, “continual,” create a sense of inevitability, and strongly communicate hope and renewal.

In Section A', Geter reprises the opening melodic figure, now with the text, “To frozen clods ever the spring's invisible law returns,” brilliantly creating a musical picture of the textual idea of renewal. This metaphor suggests that just as the barren earth of winter inevitably gives way to fertile soil in spring, so life's moments of strife transform into times of renewal. This theme is further emphasized by bringing back the soloist to deliver the cantata's central message: “Nothing is ever really lost.”

The coda brings the movement to a climactic moment, punctuated by the addition of the title word, “Hope!” on a strong tonic chord. Following this, the final phrase features the choir humming a tonic chord while the soloist gently reiterates for the last time, “Nothing is ever really lost.” The score indicates *diminuendo al niente* in all parts, combined with the instruction for the cello to “Continue as if moving further into the distance.” This creates a fading effect that lingers beyond the choir's release. The optional extension of the cello's ostinato contributes to the effect, with each repetition growing quieter. The cello's ostinato symbolizes the perpetual flow of life, time, and hope. These final measures encapsulate Geter's masterful portrayal of continuity and transformation. As the music gradually fades, it conveys that although individuals experience physical death, the cycle of life endures beyond what is immediately visible or perceptible.

Conclusion

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow is a powerful musical response to the COVID-19 pandemic that charts a journey from fear to hope. The first movement, “Fear,” portrays the physical and emotional manifestations of anxiety. “The Prayer” and “Breathe,” the second and third movements, focus on meditative practices intended to calm the body and mind, while the fourth movement, “The Resolve,” and the final movement, “Hope,”

emphasize resilience and the belief in a brighter future despite present struggles. The work's contrasting textures, text-painting, and harmonic choices amplify these themes. It is a composition with universal relevance that merits attention not only for its artistic and technical excellence but also for the profound message it conveys. 

Editor's note: Composer headshot on page 68 by Rachel Hadiashar

NOTES

- ¹ The voice part of the soloist is not specified in the score; however, the range is well suited for a soprano or tenor.
- ² Merrin Guice and Damien Geter, *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Sociopolitical Lens* (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2014).
- ³ The film was produced by The Washington Chorus with executive producers Eugene Rodgers and Stephen Beaudoin. “Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow,” The Washington Chorus, <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁴ “A Note from Composer Damien Geter,” <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁵ Megan Levad, *Why We Live in the Dark Ages* (Tavern Books, 2014).
- ⁶ Megan Levad, *What Have I to Say to You* (Tavern Books, 2018).
- ⁷ Gay Wilson Allen and Alexander Norman Joffares, “Walt Whitman,” Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Last updated March 2024, www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman.
- ⁸ Damien Geter, Zoom interview with author, April 2024.
- ⁹ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁰ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹¹ Aminata Sei, e-mail correspondence with author, 2024.
- ¹² Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹³ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁴ The score does not specifically indicate that the soloist should join the alto line (which has the melody). However, the soloist in the premiere recording did so, and in correspondence with the author, Geter shared that this decision is up to the conductor.
- ¹⁵ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁶ Walt Whitman, “Continuities,” *New York Herald* (March 20, 1888).