

A P O R T R A I T I N G R E Y S

for SSAA choir (+ SA soli)

PERUSAL ONLY

Jens Ibsen

Program Notes:

I was first drawn to this stunning William Carlos Williams text because of the beautiful way it spoke to a phenomenon with which every Bay Area denizen is familiar: the fog. He uses the backdrop of “a grey, broken sky” to illustrate the growing distance between two people, and the landscape in which they grow inevitably apart. Their bodies and minds attract and repel each other, only for them to find themselves ultimately on different levels, at unreconcilable planes of perspective in the haunting final quatrain. The “greyness” Williams speaks of is so evocative and could symbolize many things: mental illness, divergent life paths, resentment, or simply the suffocating forces of existence with which we all grapple. In my setting, I see the greyness as the very thing tearing these people apart; the word being filled with the frustration and anguish the speaker feels at the ever-widening gap before them. The grey is not *just* grey but filled with all the colors of a complicated relationship coming to a close.

Text:

Will it never be possible
to separate you from your greyness?
Must you be always sinking backward
into your grey-brown landscapes—and trees
always in the distance, always against a grey sky?

Must I be always
moving counter to you? Is there no place
where we can be at peace together
and the motion of our drawing apart
be altogether taken up?

I see myself
standing upon your shoulders touching
a grey, broken sky—but you, weighted down with me,
yet gripping my ankles,—move
laboriously on,
where it is level and undisturbed by colors.

William Carlos Williams

A Portrait in Greys

Commissioned by the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir,
Eric Tuan, Artistic Director; for Ancora,
with support from the Robert Geary Fund for Musical Innovation

William Carlos Williams
(1883-1963)

Jens Ibsen (ASCAP)
(2021)

Nebulous, desolate ♩ = 58

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto 1

Alto 2

Piano (rehearsal only)

Will it

Will it will it will it will it

5

S. Solo

S1

S2

A1

A2

ne - ver, Will it ne - ver, Will

will it will it will it will it

will it will it will it will it

accel.----- Forlorn, bleak, ♩ = 66

S. Solo *f* it ne - ver be poss - i - ble *p f* to sep - ar - ate you

Whisper, ad lib., menacingly. Rhythms are approximate, can be faster or slower than written. No two people should enter together.

S1 *f* *p* *mf* *p* it Ne-ver be ne-ver be poss-i-ble *p* *mf* *p* sep-ar-ate to sep-ar-ate

S2 *p* *f* it *p* *mf* *p* Ne-ver be ne-ver be poss-i-ble *p* *mf* *p* sep-ar-ate to

A1 *p* *f* will it

A2 *mf* *f* will it

S. Solo *p* *f* from your grey - ness, *p* from your

S1 *p* *mf* *p* from your grey - ness

S2 *mf* *p* sep-ar-ate *p* *mf* *p* from your grey - ness

A1 *p* *mf* *p* from your grey - ness

A2 *p* *mf* *p* from your grey - ness

17 *f*

S. Solo

grey - ness?

S1 *pp* *f* *div.*
grey - ness? Must you be al - ways sink -

S2 *pp* *f*
grey - ness? Must you be al - ways sink -

A1 *pp* *f* *p* *mf*
grey - ness? Must you be, must you be

A2 *pp* *f* *p* *mf*
grey - ness? Must you be, must you be

20

S1 *p*
ing back - wards sink - ing back Must you be must you be must you be must you be

S2 *p*
ing back - wards sink - ing back Must you be must you be must you be must you be

A1 *mf* *f* *p*
In - to your grey - blown land - scapes?

A2 *mf* *f* *p*
In - to your grey - blown land - scapes?

23 *sub. p*

S1 *f sf*

S2 *sub. p f sf*

A1 *mf p f sf*

A2 *mf p f sf*

al - ways a grey sky? —

al - ways a grey sky? —

And trees al - ways in the dist - ance, al - ways a - gainst a grey sky? —

And trees al - ways in the dist - ance, al - ways a - gainst a grey sky? —

28 *pp* *solo p forlorn* *mf > p* *p* *mf*

S1 Must I be al - ways, must I be al -

S2 *pp* *solo p indignant* *3* *3*

A1 *pp < mp > pp* *mp* *pp*

A2 *pp < mp > pp* *mp* *pp*

[m] Must I be al - ways! Must I be

34 *p*

S1
ways, must I be, must I be, must I be, must I be al-ways mov-ing

S2
al-ways! al-ways! must I be, must I be al-ways mov-ing

A1 *mp* *pp*

A2 *mp* *pp*

39 *f* *p* *mf* *tutti* *mf*

S1
count-er to you? Is there no place we can

S2
count-er to you? [a] Is there no place

A1 *mp* *mf* *p*
[a] Is there no place Is there no

A2 *mp* *mf* *p*
[a] Is there no place is

43

S1 *f*
 — be — to-gether, — is there no place we can be — to - geth-er? —

S2 *mf*
 place Is there no no, —

A1 *mf* *p*
 place Is there no Is there no —

A2 *mf* *p*
 — there no place, — is — there no place, —

46

S1 *mf* *f*
 and the mo - tion of our draw-ing a-part be

S2 *mf* *pp* *mf* *f*
 of our — draw-ing a - part be

A1 *mf* *p* *mf* *mf* *f* *p*
 Is there no Is there no place, Is there no is — there no — place, Is there no Is there no place,

A2 *mf* *p* *mf* *mf* *f* *p*
 Is there no Is there no place, Is there no is — there no — place, Is there no Is there no place,

molto rit.----- *a tempo*

49

S1 *p* *f* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
al - to - geth - er tak - en up, up,

S2 *p* *f* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
al - to - geth - er tak - en ta - ken up, ta - ken up,

A1 *f* 3 *p* *f* *pp* *p* *pp*,
Is there no is there no, is there no Ta - ken up,

A2 *f* 3 *p* 3 *f* *p* *pp*,
Is there no is there no place Up,

54

S1 *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
up, up, up

S2 *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
ta - ken up, ta - ken up, up

A1 *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
tak - en up, ta - ken up,

A2 *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp*,
tak - en up, tak - en up, up

A Portrait in Greys

60

S1

S2

A1

A2

p *mf* *p*

I see, I see my-self stand-ing u-pon your shoul-ders touch-ing a grey,

66

S1

S2

A1

A2

p *mf* *pp* *p* *mp*

Bro-ken sky You

Bro-ken sky But you, You

grey sky but you, weight-ed down with me, yet gripp-ing my ank-les,

sky Gripp-ing my ank-les

pp whispered 6

A Portrait in Greys

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S1 *f* *pp*
le - vel

S2 *p* *f* *pp*
[m] le - vel

A1 move la-bor-ri-ous-ly on, where it is le - vel and un-dis-turbed by

A2 *pp* *f* *pp*
[m] le - vel

Whisper, ad lib., menacingly. Rhythms are approximate, can be faster or slower than written. No two people should enter together.

79

S1 *mf* 5 *n*
Weigh-ted down with me

S2 *mf* 5 *n*
It is un-dis-turbed

A1 *pp*
— co-lors and un-dis-turbed un-dis-turbed un-dis-turbed un-dis-turbed

A2 *mf* *n*
by col-ors

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