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“Christmas 1945”

Michael J. Diorio

SATB a cappella

Michael J. Diorio

Michael J. Diorio (b. 1978) earned degrees in organ performance, with piano and music history concentrations from Westminster Choir College, the Institute of Sacred Music and the School of Music at Yale University, and the College of Fine Arts at Boston University, respectively. His principal teachers in organ were Eugene Roan, Martin Jean, and James David Christie. Piano studies were with Philip Sbrolla and Phyllis Lehrer. Studies in musicology have led to Dr. Diorio serving as a special project editor for Carus-Verlag (Stuttgart), by whom his dissertation is published as a first-edition of the *Missa Hyemalis* by Franz Xaver Richter.

As a recitalist, Dr. Diorio has performed throughout the United States and in Europe, where he was presented with a citation for an outstanding public performance by the Mayor of Innsbruck. As an organist and choir director Dr. Diorio has held positions at the Episcopal Cathedral in the Diocese of New Jersey, Washington Memorial Chapel (Valley Forge, PA) and, currently, at Church of the Redeemer (Bryn Mawr, PA). As a teacher he has taught at The Lawrenceville School where he served as School Organist and taught course work within the Religion and Philosophy Department.

James Agee

James Agee (1909-1955) was a famed American journalist, screenwriter, critic, and a Pulitzer Prize winning author and poet. He was also one of the credited screenwriters on two of the most respected films of the 1950s: *The African Queen* (1951) and *The Night of the Hunter* (1955).

Agee's work "Descriptions of Elysium", from *Permit Me Voyage*, bore "Sure On This Shining Night", which has been set to music by composers such as René Clausen, Samuel Barber and Morten Lauridsen. The text of *Christmas 1945* is a beautifully provocative poem that reframes Christmas, drawing characters from the past into events and players of the present, and the future. The similes and questions posed are just as poignant today as they were when first written in 1945. Humanity, divinity, innocence and love are all questioned inasmuch as their potency and relevance are concerned in our current time.

Once more as in the ancient morning,
The slow beasts, the fierce newborn cry;
And, in the heart the dreadful warning:
Is it I?

All each heart holds of love, resolves
Once more today in angry grief,
Enduring courage; and dissolves
In unbelief.

The Magi's gifts are subtle bribes:
The shepherds worship clock and wage:
In rattling arms, roared diatribes,
Wakes the new Age.

And, even now, at the town gate,
Welcomed by many, fought by few,
The clangor grows of Herod's hate
In the morning's blue.

And, in the straw, they hear, and stay.
All that is brave and innocent,
all that is love, reborn today,
Is its time spent?

Where shall He flee, whose force is naught?
Where lies that Egypt which sufficed of old,
Now that each man is wrought
Herod, and Christ?

Written for the choirs of Church of The Redeemer, Bryn Mawr, PA
and their Service of Nine Lessons & Carols, 2015

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James Agee (1909-1955)

Michael J. Diorio

Moderate
pp

Soprano
Hmm _____ Ooh

Alto
Hmm _____ Ooh

Tenor

Bass

Piano, for rehearsal only
Moderate
pp

Text: "Christmas 1945" from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF JAMES AGEE by James Agee.
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4

Ooh

Ooh

mp

Ooh

4

7

pp

Hmm

pp

Hmm

mp

Once more as in the an-cient morn- ing — The slow beasts, the fierce new born

mp

Once more as in the an-cient morn- ing — The slow beasts, the fierce new born

7

pp

mp

10

Ooh Ooh And, in the heart the dread-ful warn-ing: Is it
 Ooh Ooh Hmm Is it
 cry; Hmm Is it
 cry; Hmm Is it

13

I? Ah Ah *p*
 I? Ah *mp* All each heart holds of love, re-
 I? Ah *p* Ooh Ooh
 Ooh Ooh
 I? Ah *p* Hmm

16

Ah

-solves once more to - day in an - gry grief

Ah Ah Ooh Ooh Ah Ah

Ah Ah Ooh Ooh Ah Ah

Ah

16

19 **meno mosso**

en - dur - ing cour - age; and dis - solves in un - be - lief.

en - dur - ing cour - age; and dis - solves in un - be - lief.

en - dur - ing cour - age; and dis - solves in un - be - lief.

en - dur - ing cour - age; and dis - solves in un - be - lief.

19 **meno mosso**

a tempo

22 *p* *mf*

Hmm_____ The Ma - gi's gifts are sub - tle bribes:_____

p *mf*

Hmm_____ Ma - gi's gifts are sub - tle bribes:_____

p *mf*

8 Hmm_____ The Ma - gi's gifts are sub - tle bribes:_____

p *mf*

8 Hmm_____ Ma - gi's gifts are sub - tle bribes:_____

22 **a tempo**

p *mf*

25

the shep - herds wor - ship clock and wage:

shep - herds wor - ship clock and wage:_____

8 the shep - herds wor - ship clock and wage:

shep - herds wor - ship clock and wage:

25

27

in rat-tling arms, roared di - a - tribes, _____ wakes the new

in rat - tl - ing arms, roared di - a - tribes, _____ wakes the new

8 in rat - tl - ing arms, roared di - a - tribes, _____ wakes the new

in rat - tl - ing arms, roared di - a - tribes, _____ wakes the new

27

29

Age. _____ And e - ven now, at the town gate, _____

Age. _____ And e - ven now, at the town gate, _____

8 Age. _____ And e - ven now at the town gate, _____

Age. _____ And now at the town gate, _____

29

32

wel - comed by man - y, fought by few, the

wel - comed by man - y, fought by few,

wel - comed by man - y, fought by few,

wel - comed by man - y, fought by few, the

32

34

the clan - gor grows of Her - od's hate in the morn - ing's

The clan - gor grows of Her - od's hate in the

The clan - gor grows of Her - od's hate in the morn - ing's

clan - gor grows of Her - od's hate in the morn - ing's

34

36 *p* **Slower** *p*

blue. _____ Hmm. And, in the straw, they hear, and

blue. _____ Hmm. _____ And, in the straw, they hear, and

blue. _____ Hmm. And, in the straw, they hear, and

blue. _____ Hmm. And, in the straw, they hear, and

36 *p* **Slower**

39 stay. All that is brave and in - no - cent,

stay. _____ All that is brave and in - no - cent,

stay. All that is brave and in - no - cent, _____

stay. All that is brave and in - no - cent,

39

42 *pp* **rall.**

all that is love, re-born to-day, is its time spent?

pp *p*

all that is love, re-born to-day, Hmm

pp *p*

all that is love, re-born to-day, Hmm

pp *p*

all that is love, re-born to-day, Hmm

42 **rall.**

pp *p*

45 **A tempo**

mp

Where shall He flee, whose force is naught?

mp

Where shall He flee, whose force is naught?

mp

Where shall He flee, whose force is naught?

mp

Where shall He flee, whose force is naught?

45 **A tempo**

mp

47 **Slowing**

Where lies that E-gypt which suf - ficed of old, now that each

Where lies that E-gypt which suf - ficed of old, now that each

Where lies that E-gypt which suf - ficed of old, now that each

Where lies that E-gypt which suf - ficed of old, now that each

47 **Slowing**

50

man is wrought Her - od, and Christ?

man is wrought Her - od, and Christ?

man is wrought Her - od, and Christ?

man is wrought Her - od, and Christ?

50