

Leaves of Grass – Ode to America

Thomas Lloyd

*composed for the July 2004 tour of the Bucks County Choral Society
to Tallinn, Estonia, and St. Petersburg, Russia*

Leaves of Grass – Ode to America

Thomas Lloyd

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right
it will be in the valley of love and delight.*

Simple Gifts (Shaker Folk Song)

As a strong bird on pinions free,
Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,
Such be the thought I'd think to-day of thee, America,
Such be the recitative I'd bring to-day for thee.

Walt Whitman (1872) – from “As a strong bird on pinions free” (*Leaves of Grass*)

* * *

A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with
full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is,
any more than he.
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition,
out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer, designedly dropt,

*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd,
and carry the young lambs in his bosom.*

R. Nathaniel Dett – from *Listen to the Lambs*

Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that
we may see and remark, and say, *Whose?*
Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic;
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white;
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Walt Whitman (1855) – from “Song of Myself” (*Leaves of Grass*)

* * *

*O beautiful for pilgrim's feet
Whose stern, impassioned stress,
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine ev'ry flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law.*

Katherine Lee Bates/Samuel A. Ward – from *America the Beautiful*

...a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
...[can] any nation so conceived and so dedicated...long endure[?]

Abraham Lincoln (1863) - from *Gettysburg Address*

Duration – approx. 9 minutes

For the July 2004 tour of the Bucks County Choral Society to Estonia and Russia, coming at a time when US foreign policy was the center of world-wide controversy and concern, I wanted to bring music that would convey to a foreign audience something of the contemporary American spirit, with a combination of both the confident exuberance and the spiritual humility that can both be found in the American tradition. I was surprised by how easily the poetic incantations of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address could be adapted, at a somewhat slower tempo, to the same melody inspired by the over-the-top lyricism of Whitman's "As a strong bird on pinions free." Three traditional melodies are quoted for the rich national associations they evoke and the context they provide for the final question that Lincoln's words prophetically pose again for our time. – TL

Leaves of Grass - Ode to America

for Jeremy and Devin

Thomas Lloyd

♩ = 96

SOPRANO
mf 'Tis the gift, 'tis the gift, *pp* to come down, to come down,

ALTO
pp 'Tis the gift, to come down,

TENOR
8 to be free, *pp* where you ought to

BASS
pp A - me - ri ca

Piano
(for rehearsal only)

♩ = 96

For ease of reading, the choral score for this piece is in F; however, for maintaining pitch and best sound, it should be performed in F#; a piano-vocal score in F# is available for this purpose.

8

S. *rallentando* come down, 'twill be in the val - ley of love *f* Joy - ous, *Exuberant* ♩ = 50

A. come down, 'twill be in the val - ley of love *f* Joy - ous,

T. be, when we find our - selves *f* Joy - ous, *poco rit.*

B. come down, in the place just right, and de - light. *f*

Pno. ♩ = 50

16

S. amp-lest, hea-ven-ward clea - ving Joy-ous, amp-lest, hea - ven-ward clea-ving, As a

A. amp-lest, hea-ven-ward clea - ving, Joy-ous, amp-lest, hea - ven-ward clea-ving, As a

T. amp-lest, hea ven-ward clea - ving, Joy ous,- amp-lest, hea ven - ward clea ving, As a

B. Free, heav'n - ward clea - ving, Strong, free, heav'n - ward clea - ving, As a

Pno.

24

S. strong_ bird on pin - ions free, Joy-ous the am plest spa - ces hea - ven - ward clea - ving Such be the thought I'd

A. strong_ bird on pin - ions free, Joy-ous the am plest spa - ces hea - ven ward clea - ving Such be the thought I'd

T. strong_ bird on pin - ions free, hea - ven ward clea - ving Such be the thought I'd

B. strong_ bird on pin - ions free, hea - ven ward clea - ving Such be the thought I'd

Pno.

(16ths well articulated) *f* *(sustained)*

35

S. think to -day| of thee, A - me-ri-ca, ___ Such be the re-ci-ta-tive___ I'd bring to day

A. think to -day| of thee, A - me-ri-ca, Such be the re-ci-ta-tive___ I'd bring to day

T. think to -day| of thee, A- me ri ca, ___ Such be the re-ci-ta-tive___ I'd bring to-

B. think to -day| of thee, A - me-ri-ca, Such be the re-ci-ta-tive___ I'd bring to-

Pno.

44

S. for thee. bring to thee, to thee.

A. for thee. bring to thee, to thee.

T. day for thee. A - me ri - ca to thee.

B. day for thee. A - me-ri-ca, A - me-ri-ca!

Pno.

$\text{♩} = 72$ *freely, with a warm sound and natural inflection*

56 *Sop. 1* *poco rit.* *Sop. 2:*

mf A child said "What is the grass?" "What is the grass?" fetch-ing it to me with full

"What is the grass?" fetch-ing it to me with full

"What is the grass?" fetch-ing it to me with full

"What is the grass?" fetch-ing it to me with full

Pno.

64 *p*

hands; How could I an-swer the child? I do not know what it is, a - ny more than he.

hands; How could I an-swer the child? I do not know what it is, a - ny more than he.

hands; How could I an-swer the child? I do not know what it is, a - ny more than he.

hands; How could I an-swer the child? I do not know what it is, a - ny more than he.

Pno.

rall..... *f broadly*

69

S. I guess it must be the flag of my di-spo-si - tion out of hope - ful green stuff wo - ven. Or I guess it is the

A. I guess it must be the flag of my di-spo-si - tion out of hope ful green stuff wo - ven. Or I guess it is the

T. I guess it must be the flag of my di - po - si - tion out of hope - ful green stuff wo - ven. Or I guess it is the

B. I guess it must be the flag of my di-spo-si - tion out of hope - ful green stuff wo - ven. Or I guess it is the

Pno.

(a tempo)

73

S. hand-ker-chief of the Lord, Heshall feed his *as if from a distance*

A. hand-ker-chief of the Lord, Heshall feed his

T. hand-ker-chief of the Lord, A scent-ed gift and re - mem - bran cer, de - sign - ed - ly dropt, He

B. hand-ker-chief of the Lord, A scent-ed gift and re - mem - bran cer, de - sign - ed - ly dropt, He

Pno.

77 *poco rall.*

S. flocklike ashep- herd, and car ry the young lambs in_ his

A. flocklike ashep- herd, and car ry the young lambs in_ his

T. — Bear-ing the ow-ner's name some - way in the cor-ners

B. — Bear-ing the ow-ner's name some-way in the cor-ners, in his

Pno.

81 *(connected)*

S. bo- som. that we may see and re - mark, and say, and say, and say, Whose? Whose?

A. bo- som. that we may see and re - mark, and say, and say, Whose? Whose?

T. — that we may see and re - mark, and say, Whose? Whose?

B. bo- som. that we may see and re - mark, and say, Whose? Whose?

Pno.

(a tempo)

86 *pp* *rall.....*

S. *Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?*

A. *Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose?*

T. *Whose? Whose? Whose? Whose? **mf** the pro-duced babe of the ve ge-ta - tion.*

B. ***mf** Or I guess the grass is it-self a child, a child,*

Pno.

90 *ff - ecstatic!*

S. *Or I guess it is, Or I guess it is a u - ni - form hie-ro-gly- phic: I guess it is a*

A. *Or I guess it is, Or I guess it is a u - ni - form hie - ro-gly- phic: I guess it is a*

T. *Or I guess it is, Or I guess it is a u - ni - form hie-ro-gly- phic: I guess it is a*

B. *Or I guess it is, Or I guess it is a u - ni - form hie-ro-gly- phic: I guess it is a*

Pno.

92 *with energy*

S. u - ni - form hie - ro - gly - phic:

A. u - ni - form hie - ro - gly - phic: And it means, -

T. u - ni - form hie - ro - gly - phic: And it means,

B. u - ni - form hie - ro - gly - phic: Sprout - ing a - like in broad zones and nar - row zones, -

Pno.

95 *rall.....* *ff a tempo*

S. Grow - ing a - mong black___ folks as a mong white; Ka - nuck, Tu cka - hoe, Con - gress - man, Cuff,

A. Grow - ing a - mong black___ folks as a mong white; Ka - nuck, Tu cka - hoe, Con - gress - man, Cuff,

T. Grow - ing a - mong black___ folks as a mong white; Ka - nuck, Tu cka - hoe, Con - gress - man, Cuff,

B. Grow - ing a - mong black___ folks as a mong white; Ka - nuck, Tu cka - hoe, Con - gress - man, Cuff,

Pno.

with energy

98

S. Ka nuck, Tu cka-hoe, Con-gress-man, Cuff, I give them the same,

A. Ka nuck, Tu cka-hoe, Con-gress-man, Cuff, I give them the same,

T. Ka nuck, Tu cka-hoe, Con-gress-man, Cuff, I give them the same,

B. Ka nuck, Tu cka-hoe, Con-gress-man, Cuff, I give them the same,

Pno.

100

S. I re-ceive them the same, I re-ceive them the same, re-ceive them the same.

A. I re-ceive them the same, I re-ceive them the same, I re-ceive them the same.

T. I re-ceive them the same, I re-ceive them the same. *mf* And now it seems to me the

B. same, I re-ceive them the same, I re-ceive them the same. And now it seems to me the

Pno.

broadening *ff*

105 *ethereal*

S. *p* O beau - ti-ful for pil - grim's feet whose stern, im - pas - sioned stress,

A. *pp* O beau - ti-ful for pil - grim's feet whose stern, im - pas - sioned stress,

T. *pp* beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves. *pp* the beau - ti-ful un - cut hair of

B. beau-ti-ful un-cut hair of graves. the beau - ti-ful un - cut hair of

Pno.

111 *poco rit.*

S. A tho - rough-fare for free - dom beat a-cross the wil-der-ness!

A. A tho - rough-fare for free - dom beat a-cross the wil-der-ness!

T. graves. Grow-ing a - mong black__ folks as a-mong white, *mp* A -

B. graves. A - me - ri ca! Grow-ing a - mong black__ folks as a-mong white, A -

Pno.

117

mf

S. Con - firm thy soul in self - con - trol, thy

A. Con - firm thy soul in self - con - trol,

T. *f* me - ri-ca, A - me - ri-ca, God mend thine e - v'ry flaw, Con - firm thy soul in self - con - trol, thy

B. me - ri-ca, A - me - ri-ca, God mend thine e - v'ry flaw, Con - firm thy soul in self - con - trol,

Pno.

124

p *mf* *mf* *sim.*

S. li ber - ty in law. *mp* li - ber - ty, free - dom, *mp* wil - der - ness, beau - ti ful li - ber -

A. mend thy soul li - ber -

T. li - ber - ty in law. *mp* li - ber - ty, free - dom, *mp* wil - der - ness beau - ti ful li - ber -

B. mend thy soul li - ber -

Pno.

131 $\text{♩} = 96$ *broadly*

S. ty! A new na - tion, con - ceived in Li - ber - ty and de - di - ca - ted to the

A. ty! A new na - tion, con - ceived in Li - ber - ty and de - di - ca - ted to the

T. ty! A new na - tion con - ceived in Li - ber - ty the

B. ty! A new na - tion con - ceived in Li - ber - ty the

Pno.

140

S. pro-po-si - tion that all men are cre - a - ted e - qual in A - me - ri - ca

A. pro-po-si - tion that all men are cre - a - ted e - qual in A -

T. pro-po-si - tion that all men are cre - a - ted e - qual in A - me - ri - ca,

B. pro-po-si - tion that all men are cre - a - ted e - qual in A -

Pno.

148

S. *f* *mf Sop. I*
Such be the re ci-ta-tive I'd bring to-day for thee. Can a ny

A. *p*
me-ri-ca, Such be the re ci-ta-tive I'd bring to-day for thee.

T. *p*
Such be the re ci-ta-tive I'd bring to-day for thee.

B. *p*
me-ri-ca, Such be the re ci-ta-tive I'd bring to-day for thee.

Pno.

157

S. *mp* *(tutti)* *poco rall.*
na-tion so con-ceived and so de-di-ca-ted long en-dure?

A. *Sop. 2*
so con ceived, long en - dure?

T. *Alto* *p* *(non rall.)*
so con ceived, and so de-di-ca-ted long en-dure?

B. *p*
so con ceived, long en - dure?

Pno.