Look Out

To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival. – Wendell Berry





















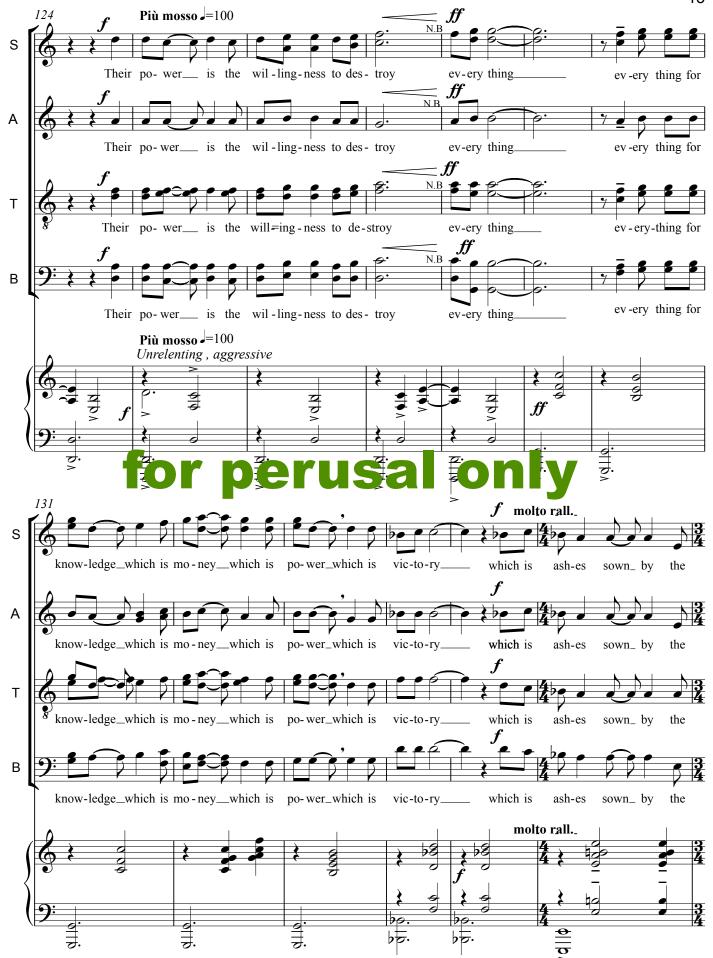
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JOAN SZYMKO
Joan Szymko's choral
music is regularly
performed at national
and international
choral festivals and
conferences. Using
a familiar music
vocabulary, she
creates works that are
nonetheless fresh and

engaging; compelling and inspiring, her text selections are as notable as her music. Szymko is widely recognized as a prominent composer of exceptional repertoire for women's choir. The American Choral Director's Association recognized Szymko's lasting impact on the choral arts in America by awarding her the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission in 2010.

Szymko lives in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. As resident composer she enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with Portland based *Do Jump! Movement Theater*, (1995-2012) creating vocal underscoring for major touring productions. A dynamic conductor she has served on the choral music faculty of Portland State University (2013-15) and has led *Aurora Chorus* as Artistic Director since 1993. As a visiting artist, Szymko workshops her compositions with choirs in a variety of educational and festival settings across the country and abroad.

Look Out by Wendell Berry

Come to the window, look out, and see the valley turning green in remembrance of all springs past and to come, the woods perfecting with immortal patience the leaves that are the work of all of time, the sycamore whose white limbs shed the history of a man's life with their old bark, the river quivering under the morning's breath like the touched skin of a horse, and you will see also the shadow cast upon it by fire, the war that lights its way by burning the earth. Come to your windows, people of the world, look out at whatever you see wherever you are, and you will see dancing upon it that shadow. You will see that your place, wherever it is, your house, your garden, your shop, your forest, your farm, bears the shadow of its destruction by war which is the economy of greed which is plunder which is the economy of wrath which is fire.

The Lords of War sell the earth to buy fire, they sell the water and air of life to buy fire.

They are little men grown great by willingness to drive whatever exists into its perfect absence.

Their intention to destroy any place is solidly founded upon their willingness to destroy every place.

Every household of the world is at their mercy, the households of the farmer and the otter and the owl are at their mercy. They have no mercy. Having hate, they can have no mercy. Their greed is the hatred of mercy. Their pockets jingle with the small change of the poor. Their power is the willingness to destroy everything for knowledge which is money which is power which is victory which is ashes sown by the wind.

Leave your windows and go out, people of the world, go into the streets, go into the fields, go into the woods and along the streams. Go together, go alone. Say no to the Lords of War which is Money which is Fire. Say no by saying yes to the air, to the earth, to the trees, yes to the grasses, to the rivers, to the birds and the animals and every living thing, yes to the small houses, yes to the children. Yes.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Look Out was commissioned by Women in Harmony (Portland, Maine) and premiered at the ensemble's 25th Anniversary concert season finale in may 2018. When asked to supply some comments for the concert program, I wrote the following:

Wendell Berry's poem gave me a vessel in which to pour my grief. Grief at the seemingly bottomless, soulless greed of those who wield power over land, people, governments, information— over the future. But Berry's poem, and the choral setting I created has a long arc, as does history. And so the conclusion of the work is really a beginning— a gathering of energy and of courage — of heart. —Joan Szymko

PERFORMANCE NOTES

This is a work of dramatic intensity. Lean into it. Focus on tone color and articulation to express the shifting timbre of the narrative: pastoral, foreboding, forewarning and finally, an affirmative call to action.