

M. E. Valverde

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**D a r e s t , O S o u l**  
*for TTBB chorus a cappella*

## About the Poet

Born the second of nine children in 1819, Walt Whitman grew up on Long Island and in Brooklyn. An avid young reader, he worked the trade of printing as a teenager in New York City. Subsequently, he spent five years as a schoolteacher back on Long Island before pursuing a long-term career in journalism. While working for a few months as editor of a New Orleans paper, he observed the sale of enslaved humans. Upon his return to New York, he was motivated to start a "free soil" newspaper called the *Brooklyn Freeman*. Though not an abolitionist himself, he wrote a collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*, which emphasized the potential of humanity to transcend the limits of morality, psychology, and politics. The first edition of the book — which was regarded as highly controversial for the time — was copyrighted in 1855. Over nearly forty years, after multiple new editions, he expanded it from twelve poems to over three hundred. During the Civil War, Whitman traveled to Washington, D.C. to visit his brother who was wounded fighting for the Union. He remained for over a decade and devoted a significant amount of time volunteering at hospitals, meeting as many as 100,000 wounded soldiers. Having intimately witnessed the horrific repercussions of war, he entered another period of prolific writing. In 1865, he published *Drum Taps* and *Sequel*, featuring an elegy for President Abraham Lincoln. Not eight years later, he suffered a stroke and became partially paralyzed. He moved to Camden, New Jersey and lived out his final years elaborating on *Leaves of Grass*.

*Darest thou now O Soul,  
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,  
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?*

*No map there, nor guide,  
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,  
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.*

*I know it not O Soul,  
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,  
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.*

*Till when the ties loosen,  
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,  
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.*

*Then we burst forth, we float,  
In Time and Space O Soul, prepared for them,  
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O Soul.*

"Darest Thou Now O Soul" from *Leaves of Grass* (1881) by Walt Whitman.

## Composer's Notes

Completed in 2009, following study at L'École Normale de Musique de Paris, at a program committed to preserving the teachings of Nadia Boulanger, "Darest, O Soul" was a passion project composed for no one in particular. It was fortuitously recorded in 2015 by the German chamber choir Ensemble VocaPella Limburg, conducted by Tristan Meister, for release on their album *Vom Werden und Vergehen — Songs of Life and Death*. It was premiered in the United States by the acclaimed men's ensemble Cantus on their tour program "One Giant Leap" in September 2019.

Walt Whitman lamented the carnage of war during the years of the American Civil War; he is popularly understood to have been a gay man; and he is traditionally celebrated as a literary source for American democratic identity. The text "Darest Thou Now O Soul" appears in *Leaves of Grass* as part one of two in "Whispers of Heavenly Death," a suggestion of his contemplation on the meaning of life, mortality, and the beyond. His words inspire the "soul" pleading, "Would you dare walk with me into the unknown? Without a map, a guide, a sound, or human touch to reassure you?" Thus, the "soul" embarks on a journey with self-discovery as transportation and self-actualization as destination. The story may resonate with a variety of human experiences as a call for us to move into alignment with ourselves in our identity and in our purpose.

The singing begins with a question with innocence and wonder rather than fear. Making steps up towards manifestation, the voice grows and grows in confidence, and ultimately in response, the universe unties itself into something chaotic, enchanting, and rewarding.

dur. = ca. 3'30"

Dedicated to Tristan Meister and Ensemble Vocapella Limburg, Germany

# Darest, O Soul

for TTBB chorus a cappella

Walt Whitman  
1819-92

Mari Esabel Valverde  
b. 1987

Comodo, mysteriously ♩ = ca. 96

*mf*

Tenor 1  
Dar - est Dar - est thou now O soul, Walk out with me to - ward to -

Tenor 2  
Dar - est Dar - est thou now O soul, Walk out with me to -

Bass 1  
Dar - est Dar - est thou now O soul, Walk out with me to -

Bass 2  
Dar - est Dar - est thou now O soul, Walk out with

Piano  
(rehearsal only)

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8 *mp*

T 1  
ward to - ward the un - known re - gion, Where nei - ther ground is for the

T 2  
ward to - ward the un - known re - gion, Where nei - ther ground is for the

B 1  
ward to - ward the un - known re - gion, Where nei - ther ground is for the

B 2  
me to - ward the un - known re - gion, Where nei - ther ground is for the

14 *poco rit.* *A tempo*

T 1  
feet nor an - y path to fol - low? No map there,

T 2  
feet nor an - y path to fol - low? Nor voice sound - ing,

B 1  
feet to fol - low? nor

B 2  
feet to fol - low? nor guide,

19 *mf*

T 1 Nor face with bloom - ing flesh, nor lips, nor

T 2 *mf* Nor face with bloom - ing flesh, nor lips, nor

B 1 *mf* touch of hu - man hand, Nor face with bloom - ing flesh, nor lips, nor

B 2 *mf* Nor face with bloom - ing flesh, nor lips, nor

25 *mp* rit.

T 1 eyes, are in that land. I know it not O soul,

T 2 *mp* eyes, are in that land. I know it not O soul,

B 1 *mp* eyes, are in that land. I know it not O soul,

B 2 *mp* eyes, are in that land. I know it not O soul,

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Meno mosso

37

T 1 *p*  
all is a blank be - fore us, All waits un - dream'd of in that

T 2 *p*  
all is a blank be - fore us, All waits un - dream'd of in that

B 1 *p*  
all is a blank be - fore us, All waits un - dream'd of in that

B 2 *p*  
Nor dost\_ thou, a blank be fore us, All waits un dream'd of in that

38

T 1 *mp*  
re - gion, that in - ac - ces - si - ble land, that land.

T 2 *mp*  
re - gion, that in - ac - ces - si - ble land, that in - ac - ces - si - ble land.

B 1 *mp*  
re - gion, that in - ac - ces - si - ble land, that land.

B 2 *mp*  
re - gion, that in - ac - ces - si - ble land, that land.

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**A tempo**

*mf*

42

T 1  
Till when the ties loos - en, All but the ties e - ter - nal,

T 2  
Till when the ties loos - en, All but the ties e - ter - nal,

B 1  
Till when the ties loos - en, the ties e - ter - nal,

B 2  
Till ties Till the ties loos - en, the ties e - ter - nal,

**poco a poco accel.**

*mf*

49

T 1  
Time and Space, nor an - y bounds

T 2  
Time and Space, [Nor] sense, nor an - y bounds

B 1  
Nor dark - ness, gray - i - ta - tion, an - y bounds

B 2  
Time and Space, nor an - y bounds

## Con moto

56 *f*

T 1  
bound - ing us. \_\_\_\_\_ Then we burst forth, we

T 2  
bound - ing us. [Nor] an - y bounds... Then we burst forth, we

B 1  
bound - ing bound - ing bound - ing us. \_\_\_\_\_ Then we burst forth, we

B 2  
bound - ing us. [Nor] an - y bounds... Then we burst forth, we

62

T 1  
float, In Time and Space O soul, pre - pared for them, \_\_\_\_\_

T 2  
float, In Time and Space O soul, pre - pared for them, \_\_\_\_\_

B 1  
float, In Time and Space O soul, pre - pared for them, \_\_\_\_\_

B 2  
float, In Time and Space E - qual, e -

68

T 1  
e - quipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!)

T 2  
e - quipt at last, (O joy! fruit O fruit O fruit of

B 1  
e - quipt at last, (O joy! fruit O fruit O fruit of

B 2  
quipt at last, (O joy! O fruit O fruit of

76

T 1  
them to ful - fil O Soul.

T 2  
all!) them to ful - fil O Soul.

B 1  
all!) them to ful - fil O... to ful - fil, O Soul.

B 2  
all!) them to ful - fil O Soul.

\*ossia