

M. E. Valverde

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Look Down, Fair Moon
for SSA chorus (div.) and piano

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*.

Look down, fair moon,
and bathe this scene,
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods
on faces ghastly, swollen, purple,
On the dead on their backs
with arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus,
sacred moon.

“Look Down, Fair Moon” from *Leaves of Grass* (1881) by Walt Whitman.

Composer's Notes

This nocturne is a setting of poetry contemporary with the American Civil War. With a prayerful tone, in imperative tense, Whitman pleads for calm and healing for those who are wounded or fallen. The images of moon, “nimbus” or rain clouds, and night are all relevant. During the night, the living recover from the stresses of the day; the rain falling from the sky is a metaphor for cleansing water or tears; and of course, the mysterious beaming moon is an unchanging source of spiritual nourishment. Every time we are made aware of the unspeakable carnage of war or terrorism, foreign or domestic, we are compelled to ponder our humanity and our mortality. In the spirit of elegy, I want to inspire further contemplation and call for the reconciliation and mending of our people.

“Look Down, Fair Moon,” in its original voicing, was commissioned by Texas Music Educators Association Region 2 and was premiered in November 2015 at Margo Jones Performance Hall at Texas Woman's University by the All-District Treble Choir under the direction of Cheryl Wilson. The revoiced SATB version was commissioned by a consortium of thirteen ensembles in the United States and was premiered throughout the 2023-2024 concert season.

dur. = ca. 3'

Commissioned by Texas Music Educators Association Region 2
for the All-District Choir 2015, Denton, Texas, conducted by Cheryl Wilson

Look Down, Fair Moon

for SSA chorus (div.) and piano

Walt Whitman
1819-92

Mari Esabel Valverde
b. 1987

Soothingly, larghetto ♩ = ca. 65

The musical score is for a SSA chorus and piano. It is in the key of D major (indicated by two sharps) and 4/4 time. The tempo is 'Soothingly, larghetto' with a quarter note equal to approximately 65 beats per minute. The score consists of five staves: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Piano (right and left hands), and Piano (bass line). The vocal parts enter in the third measure with the word 'Look' on a half note. The piano accompaniment begins in the first measure with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *dim.* (diminuendo). A large diagonal watermark reading 'Respect the copyright! Not authorized for performance only!' is overlaid across the score.

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4

S 1
down, look down, fair moon, and

S 2
down, look down, fair moon, and

A
down, look down, fair moon,

Pno.
p

7

S 1
bathe this scene, *mf* *dim.*

S 2
bathe this scene, *mf* *dim.*

A
and bathe this scene,

Pno.
mp

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10

S 1 *p* *mp*
Pour soft ly down night's

S 2 *p* *mp*
Pour soft ly down night's

A *p* *mp* *div.*
Pour soft ly Pour night's

Pno. *sub. p*

12

S 1 *f*
nim bus floods

S 2 *f*
nim bus floods

A *f*
nim bus floods

Pno. *mp molto cresc.* *f*

Rec. *

mf unis.

S
on fac-es ghas - ly, swol - len fac - es swol - len

mf unis.

A
on fac - es ghas - ly, swol - len, ghas - ly,

Pno. *mp*

mp

S
pur - ple, On the dead, on their backs, with

A
pur - ple, On the dead, on their backs, with

Pno. *p*

A tempo

26

S moon. Look *mp*

A moon. Look *mp*

Pno. *mp* *dim.*

29

S 1 down, look down, fair moon, and

S 2 down, look down, fair moon, and

A down, look down, fair moon, and

Pno. *p*

32

S 1
bathe this scene. *mf*

S 2
bathe this scene. *mf*

A
bathe this scene. *mf*

Pno. *mp*

33

Pno. *mf*
(o)