

Blue! 'Tis the Life of Heaven
GP-S001.2
SATB choir, a cappella

Joshua Shank

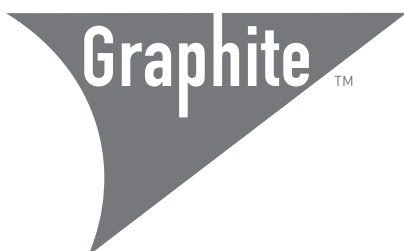
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Joshua Shank

Blue! 'Tis the Life of Heaven

for a cappella SATB choir

from *Color Madrigals*



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Performance Notes

Because of the tight harmonies, little to no vibrato is desirable.

Take a breath only when indicated by a rest.

If a crescendo appears without a starting/ending dynamic it is based on the treatment of the text.

Program Notes

Blue! 'Tis the Life of Heaven

Of all the Color Madrigals, this text is the only one written about the actual color it takes its title from. Keats captures blue in all its forms by bringing the poem from the heavens to the ocean and finally back to the earth. Because of this, the poetry becomes more and more intimate as it progresses. I chose to write a gradually expanding hymn to create a sense of reverence for my own favorite color.

Text

Answer to a Sonnet Ending Thus:

"Dark eyes are dearer far than orbs that mock the hyacinthine bell"

— J.H. Reynolds

Blue! 'Tis the life of heaven, the domain
Of Cynthia, the wide palace of the sun,
The tent of Hesperus, and all his train,
The bosomer of clouds, gold, grey and dun,
Blue! 'Tis the life of waters Ocean
And all its vassal streams, pools numberless,
May rage, and foam, and fret, but never can
Subside, if not to dark blue nativeness.
Blue! Gentle cousin to the forest-green,
Married to green in all the sweetest flowers
Forget-me-not, the blue-bell, and, that queen
Of secrecy, the violet. What strange powers
Hast thou, as a mere shadow! But how great,
When in an eye thou art, alive with fate!

— John Keats (England, 1795-1821)

FYI

If you're not a rigorous student of the classics it can be difficult to read through the poetry and understand everything Keats is talking about. Listed here are some of the more obscure things he mentions in the course of his writing which, once you know what they are, can really make each text come to life.

Cynthia: the goddess of the moon and the twin sister of Apollo (the sun). She is more commonly known as Diana or Artemis.

Hesperus: son of the Titan Iäpetus and the name of the planet Venus as it appeared after the setting sun. His three daughters (the Hesperides) are said to reside in a garden beyond the ocean.

A special note: I am especially indebted to Matthew Culloton and Vicki Peters for supporting the creation of such a large work. They and their respective choirs gave all six pieces amazing premieres in three different "volumes" (red/green, purple/yellow and blue/orange).

Commissioned by The Singers-Minnesota Choral Artists
Matthew Culloton, Conductor

Blue! 'Tis the Life of Heaven

from *Color Madrigals*

for Alice Witter

SATB Chorus, a cappella

John Keats, adapted J. S.

Joshua Shank

Reverently; but not in a hurry (♩ = ca. 70)

mf cantabile

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S Blue! 'Tis the life of hea-ven, the do - main Of

A Blue! (ooh)...

T Blue! (ooh)...

B Blue! (ooh)...

5

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S Cyn-thi-a, the wide pa - lace of the sun, The tent of

A

T

B

10

S Hes - pe - rus, and all _____ his train, _____ The bo-so-mer of clouds, _____

A _____

T _____

B _____

15

S gold, _____ grey and dun, _____ Blue! _____ *mp*

A _____ Blue! _____ 'Tis the life of wa - ters O - - - *mf cantabile*

T _____ Blue! _____ wa - ters O - cean _____ *mp*

B _____ Blue! _____ wa - ters O - cean _____ *mp*

20

S _____ Blue! _____ May *mf*

A cean _____ Blue! _____ May *sub. mp* *mf*

T _____ Blue! _____ May *mf*

B _____ Blue! _____ May *mf cantabile* *mf*

And all its vas - sal streams, _____ pools num - ber - less, _____ May

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25

S
rage, — and foam, — but ne - - - ver

A
rage, — and foam, — but ne - - - ver

T
rage, — and foam, — but ne - - - ver

B
rage, — and foam, — but ne - - - ver

28

S
can Sub - side, — if not to dark blue na - tive -

A
can — Sub - side, — if not to dark blue —

T
can Sub - side, — if not to dark blue na - tive -

B
can — Sub - side, — if not to dark blue na - tive -

32

S
ness. Blue! Gen-tle cou-sin to the fo-rest - green,

A
Blue! Gen-tle cou-sin to the fo-rest - green,

T
ness. Blue! Gen-tle cou-sin to the fo-rest - green, Mar -

B
ness. Blue! Gen-tle cou-sin to the fo-rest - green,

f

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37

S
Mar-ried to green in all the sweet est flo-wers For -

A
Mar-ried to green in all the sweet - est flo-wers For -

T
- ried to green in all the sweet - est flo-wers For -

B
Mar - ried to green in all the sweet - est flo-wers For -

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41

S *poco rit.* *lunga non. dim.* // *a tempo*
 get-me-not, the blue-bell, and, that queen Of se - cre - cy, —

A *poco rit.* *non. dim.* // *a tempo mp*
 get-me-not, the blue-bell, and, that queen Of se - cre - cy, the

T *poco rit.* *non. dim.* // *a tempo*
 get-me-not, the blue-bell, and, that queen Of se - cre - cy,

B *poco rit.* *non. dim.* // *a tempo*
 get-me-not, the blue-bell, and, that queen Of se - cre - cy,

46

S *mp* *poco rit.*
 the vi - o - let. What strange po - wers

A *poco rit.*
 vi - o - let. the vi - o - let. What strange po - wers

T *mp (non-accented word)* *poco rit.*
 the vio - let. What strange po - wers

B *mp (non-accented word)* *poco rit.*
 the vio - let. What strange po - wers

Charmed; with a new purpose and motion (♩ = ca. 80)

51 *mf* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.*

S Hast thou, as a mere sha-dow! But how great, When in an eye thou art, a -

A *mf* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.*

A Hast thou, as a mere sha-dow! But how great, When in an eye thou art, a -

T *mf* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.*

T Hast thou, as a mere sha-dow! But how great, When in an eye thou art, a -

B *mf* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.*

B Hast thou, as a mere sha-dow! But how great, When in an eye thou art, a -

56 *a tempo* *f gently* *mf* *Slowing to the end*

S live with fate!

A *a tempo* *f gently* *mf* phrase with the sopranos

A live with fate!

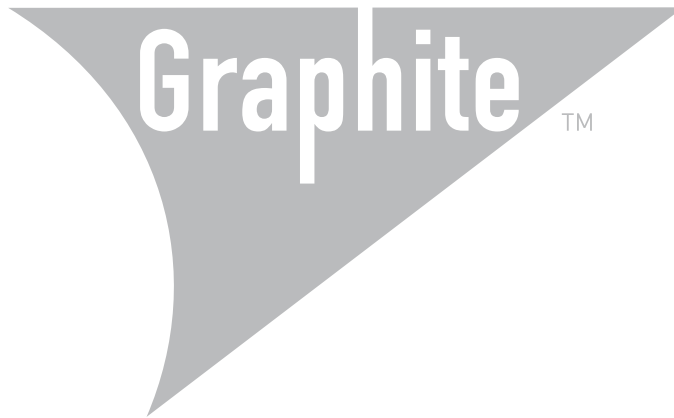
T *a tempo* *f gently* *mf* phrase with the sopranos

T live with fate!

B *a tempo* *f gently* *mf* phrase with the sopranos

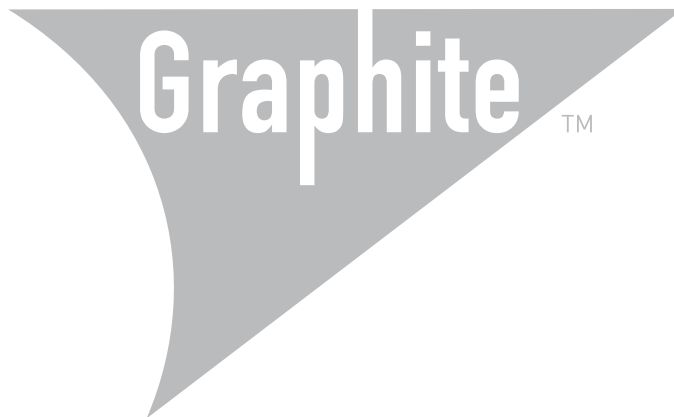
B live with fate!

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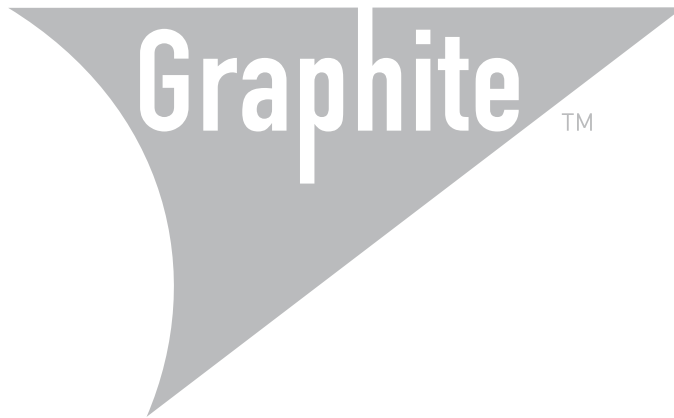
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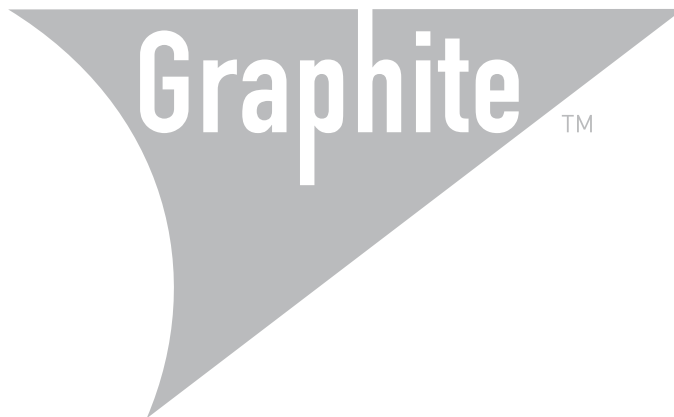
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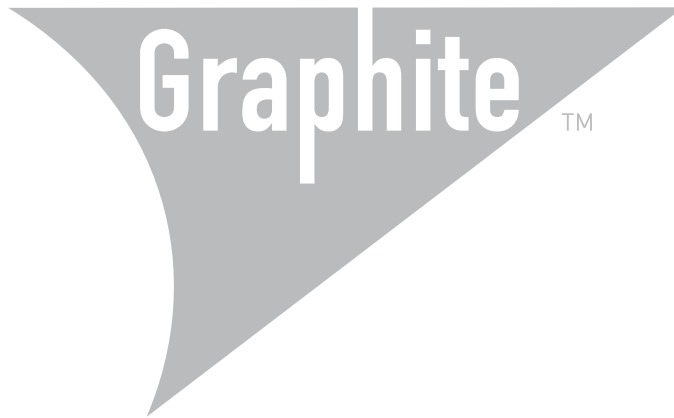
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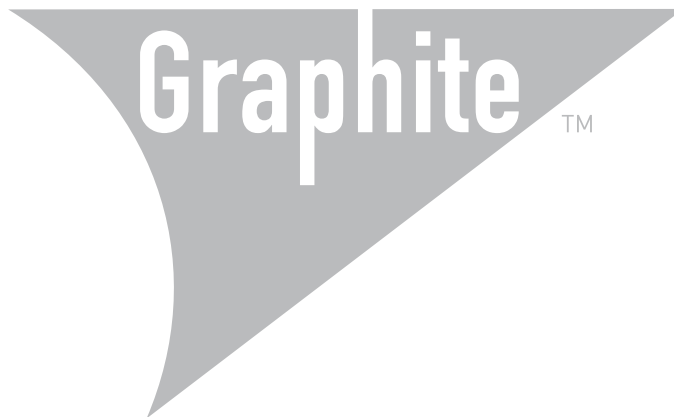
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Joshua Shank



Joshua Shank (b. 1980) has been commissioned by organizations such as the Lorelei Ensemble, the Choral Project, the American Choral Directors Association, and the Association for Music in International Schools. From 2004-2014, he served as Composers-In-Residence for the Minneapolis-based professional choir, The Singers, where he collaborated annually to expand and invigorate the repertoire for professional-caliber ensembles through innovative programming as well as new works written specifically for the ensemble. In 2002, he became the youngest recipient ever of the Raymond W. Brock Composition Award from the American Choral Directors Association. A native of Minnesota, his music was recently featured in a documentary about the extensive choral tradition in the upper Midwest, *Never Stop Singing*, and his published works have sold over 150,000 copies worldwide.

Joshua received his undergraduate degree in Music Education from Luther College where he studied conducting with Weston Noble. He has also earned master's and doctoral degrees in Musicology and Composition from the University of Texas at Austin where he studied with Donald Grantham and the late opera composer Daniel Catán. A fierce advocate for students' access to music education, he served as a public-school teacher in Minneapolis/St. Paul for many years before going on to teach at

Gonzaga University, Valley City State University, and Eastern Washington University. When he's not writing music, you can probably find him biking, studying vegetarian cooking, or watching hilariously bad movies.

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