



SAUNDER  
CHOI

MESSAGE OUT TO SEA  
(DEAR MOM...)

for SATB choir and piano

SAUNDER CHOI *music*



## PROGRAM NOTES:

When Matt asked me to write a new piece for the Sanctuary Choir of the First Presbyterian Church of Davenport, he emphasized the community's commitment to openness, inclusivity, and progressive values, particularly in supporting the LGBTQ+ community and providing assistance to refugees. Inspired by these principles, I endeavored to craft a composition that mirrors the spirit of this compassionate congregation - one that celebrates and examines love and acceptance in a nuanced way. We agreed on a piece for a Mother's Day Service.

I collaborated with my good friend and poet Brian Sonia-Wallace, and asked him to write a heartfelt letter to loving mothers who remained a refuge for their LGBTQ+ children. The line "Beyond understanding, there lives laughter" was inspired by a conversation I had with my mom a few years after I came out. I remember her telling me that she didn't fully comprehend my journey of self-discovery within the LGBTQ+ community, but she nevertheless remained a safe, loving space that allowed me to discover, navigate, and learn how to thrive as a gay immigrant.

Towards the conclusion of the composition, I made a deliberate choice to quote one of my favorite hymn tunes, the Hyfrydol. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, of which I am part of, this tune is set to the text "Blue Boat Home" - which similarly uses a lot of water/harbor imagery. Brian and I rewrote the text to "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" to connect more deeply with the themes of refuge and all-encompassing love.

In weaving together these elements, the composition strives to celebrate the ethos communities dedicated to embracing diversity, fostering refuge, and embodying the transformative power of love.

## TEXT:

### **Mother's Day Card (in a Bottle out to Sea)**

*by Brian Sonia-Wallace*

Dear mom, you were always my refuge  
When I didn't know which way to turn  
Now my ship has left those placid waters  
There's still so much to do, to be, to learn —

Dear mom, you welcome me on each return.  
Beyond understanding there lives laughter  
A torch that does not flicker as it burns  
There's still so much I lack the words to tell you,

A hopeful silence, staring at the sea  
As memories of angry voices churn  
Against the queer joy that's knocking at my door  
You saw my worth before it could be earned

Dear mom, you made my heart your first concern  
For every wave, you became my safe shore  
Dear mom, you taught me what it means to yearn  
And how an ocean lives in me.

—

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Refuge in a time of storm  
Fix our hearts in humble dwelling;  
In love's harbor, keep us warm.

Spirit, boundless with compassion,  
Pure and endless love compart;  
All across your vast creation;  
Open every shielded heart.

commissioned by the First Presbyterian Church of Davenport, Iowa  
Matt Bishop, Director of Music

# Message Out to Sea (Dear Mom...)

for SATB choir and piano

poetry by Brian Sonia-Wallace  
used by permission

Saunder CHOI

Gently ♩ = 92

Soprano *pp*  
nu \_\_\_\_\_ \*nununu... \_\_\_\_\_

Alto *pp*  
nu \_\_\_\_\_ \*nununu... \_\_\_\_\_ nu \_\_\_\_\_ nununu... \_\_\_\_\_  
*\*gentle flutter, varying speeds*

Tenor *pp*  
nu \_\_\_\_\_ \*nununu... \_\_\_\_\_ nu \_\_\_\_\_

Bass \_\_\_\_\_

Piano *p*

8

S. nu nununu...

A. nu nununu... nu

T. nununu... nu nununu...

B.

Pno.

PERUSAL SCORE

poco rit. . a tempo, rubato

15

S. nu nununu... *p*

A. nununu... nu ooh *p warmly*

T. nu nununu... nu ooh *p warmly*

B. nu \*nunu... nu ooh *p warmly*

Pno. *mp*

21 *pp* *rit.* **A** Slowly, poco rubato ♩ = 76

S. nununu... ooh

A. ooh nununu...

T. ooh Dear mom,

B. ooh Dear mom,

*p dolce*

*p dolce*

Pno. *p*

PERUSAL SCORE

28

S.

A.

T. you were al - ways my re - fuge When I did - n't know which way to

B. you were al - ways my re - fuge When I did - n't know which way to

Pno.

34

S. \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_

T. *legato*  
turn \_\_\_\_\_ Now my ship has left those pla - cid wa - ters \_\_\_\_\_

B. *legato*  
turn \_\_\_\_\_ Now my ship has left those pla - cid wa - ters \_\_\_\_\_

Pno. *mp*

PERUSAL SCORE

40

S. \_\_\_\_\_

A. \_\_\_\_\_

T. \_\_\_\_\_  
There's still so much to do, to be, to \_\_\_\_\_ learn;

B. \_\_\_\_\_  
There's still so much to do, to be, to \_\_\_\_\_ learn;

Pno. *p*

**B**

46

S. *p* ooh

A. *p* ooh

T. *mp* Dear mom, you

B. *mp* Dear mom, you

Pno. *mp* *sim.*

PERUSAL SCORE

52

S. ooh oh

A. ooh oh

T. wel-come me on each re - turn. Be-yond un-der-stand-ing there lives laugh - ter

B. wel-come me on each re - turn. Be-yond un-der-stand-ing there lives laugh - ter

Pno.

58

S. *mp* *mf*  
oh

A. *mp* *mf*  
oh

T. *mf*  
A torch that does not flick-er as it burns There's still so

B. *mf*  
A torch that does not flick-er as it burns There's still so

Pno. *mf*

PERUSAL SCORE

64

S. *poco f* *poco accel.* *p*  
ah lack the words to tell you A

A. *poco f* *mp+*  
ah lack the words to tell you A

T. *poco f*  
much I lack the words to tell you

B. *poco f*  
much I lack the words to tell you

Pno. *poco f* *f*

**C** Più mosso ♩ = 86

70

S. hope - ful si - lence sta - ring at the sea

A. hope - ful si - lence sta - ring at the sea

T. hope - ful si - lence sta - ring at the sea

B. sta - ring at the

Pno. *p*

PERUSAL SCORE

76

S. As me - mo-ries of an - gry voi - ces

A. As me - mo-ries of an - gry voi - ces

T. me-mo-ries of an - gry voi - ces

B. sea me-mo-ries of an - gry voi - ces

Pno. *mp*

82

*mf* *poco f*

S. churn \_\_\_\_\_ A - gainst the queer \_\_\_\_\_

A. churn, \_\_\_\_\_ an - gry voi - ces churn A - gainst the queer \_\_\_\_\_

T. churn, \_\_\_\_\_ an - gry voi - ces churn A - gainst the queer \_\_\_\_\_

B. churn and churn A - - gainst the queer

Pno. *mf* *poco f*

PERUSAL SCORE

88

*mf*

S. joy \_\_\_\_\_ that's knock-ing at my door \_\_\_\_\_ You *mf*

A. joy \_\_\_\_\_ that's knock-ing at my door \_\_\_\_\_ You *mf*

T. joy \_\_\_\_\_ that's knock-ing at my door \_\_\_\_\_ You *mf*

B. joy \_\_\_\_\_ that's knock - ing at my door \_\_\_\_\_ You *mf*

Pno. *mf*

94

S. *mp* *rit.* *p* //  
 saw my worth be - fore it could be earned

A. *mp* *p* //  
 saw my worth be - fore it could be earned

T. *mp* *p* //  
 saw my worth be - fore it could be earned

B. *mp* *p* //  
 saw my worth be - fore it could be earned

Pno. *mf* *p* //

# PERUSAL SCORE

**D** Slowly, rubato ♩ = 76

100

S. *p* //  
 ooh ooh

A. *p* //  
 ooh ooh

T. *mp* //  
 Dear mom, you made my heart your first con - cern

B. *mp* //  
 Dear mom, you made my heart your first con - cern

Pno. *mp* *sim.* //

107 *mf* *poco rall.* . . . *a tempo* *poco f*

S. oh a safe shore

A. oh a safe shore

T. For ev-'ry wave, you be-came my safe shore. You

B. For ev-'ry wave, you be-came my safe shore, you are my safe shore.

Pno. *mf* *poco f*

# PERUSAL SCORE

113 *mp* *mf*

S. to yearn an

A. to yearn, to yearn for an

T. taught me what it means to yearn, to yearn and

B. you taught me what it meansto yearn and

Pno. *mf*

rall. . . . . **E** Moving ahead ♩ = 80

118

S. *f*  
o - cean, yearn for love.

A. *più f expansive*  
o - cean Love di - vine, all love's ex - cel - ling

T. *f*  
how an o - cean lives in me, an o - cean lives in me,

B. *f*  
how an o - cean lives in me, an o - cean lives in me,

Pno. *poco f*  
*f*

PERUSAL SCORE

124

S. Re - fuge in a time of storm. Fix our hearts in

A. Re - fuge in a time of storm. Fix our hearts in

T. Re - fuge in a time of storm. An o - cean lives in me,

B. Re - fuge in a time of storm. An o - cean

Pno.

130

S. hum - ble\_ dwel-ling; In love's har - bor\_ keep\_ us warm.

A. hum - ble dwel - ling; In love's har-bor keep us warm...

T. an o-cean lives in me, In love's har-bor keep\_ us warm.

B. lives in me, In love's har-bor keep\_ us warm.

Pno.

PERUSAL SCORE

136 *piu f*

S. Spi - rit bound-less with\_ com - pas - sion, Pure and end - less

A. *piu f* Spi - rit, bound - less with com - pas - sion, Pure and end - less

T. *piu f* Spi - rit, bound-less with\_ com - pas - sion, Pure and end - less

B. *piu f* Spi - rit, bound - less with com - pas - sion, Pure and end - less

Pno. *piu f*

142

poco rall. . . . **F** a tempo

S. love com - part; All a - cross your vast cre - a - tion,

A. love com - part; All a - cross your vast cre - a - tion,

T. love. An o - cean lives in me, an o - cean lives in me,

B. love com - part; An o - cean lives in me, an o - cean lives in me,

Pno.

PERUSAL SCORE

148

rall. . . . .

S. o - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed heart.

A. o - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed, shiel - ded heart.

T. o - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed heart, shield - ed

B. o - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed heart, shield - ed

Pno.

**G** a tempo

rit. . . . .

154

S. *mp* O - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed

A. *mp* O - pen ev - 'ry shield - ed

T. *mp* heart. o - pen your shield-ed

B. *mp* heart. o - pen your shield-ed

Pno. *mp* *p*

PERUSAL SCORE

161

S. *p* heart. rit. . . . .

A. *p* heart.

T. *p* heart.

B. *p* heart.

Pno. *p* *pp*