

JS 052
5 minutes, 30 seconds

The oak tree and the cypress

SATB, a cappella

Music by
Joshua Shank

Text by
Kahlil Gibran

Note from the composer

I never tire of Kahlil Gibran's writings from his landmark 1923 book, *The Prophet*. It's been translated into over 100 different languages and is one of the best-selling books of all time (it has never been out of print). When a friend of mine asked me to write a piece for his upcoming wedding, I knew I'd find something in Gibran's writings that would be appropriate and, as usual, the Lebanese-American poet didn't disappoint.

The book concerns itself with the fictional prophet, Al Mustafa, who is about to embark on a ship that will take him back to his homeland from the fictional city of Orphalese. As he sets out on his journey, he is approached by a group of people with whom he engages in profound conversations about life and the human experience. One of these people in particular, a woman named Almitra, is deeply moved by the prophet's wisdom and she ends up serving as his spiritual counterpart in the narrative, guiding the flow of his teachings. Her presence and inquiries prompt the reflections that form the core of *The Prophet*.

Gibran's musing on the subject of marriage reminds the reader that marriage is a celebration of love that honors individuality and mutual respect within unity rather than some sort of merging of identities. Though there is a connection, each partner remains distinct. This idea led me to use the Tingsha bells to sort of "crack open" the listening space because they're made up of two separate bronze cymbals joined together that have to work in conjunction with one another to make a beautiful sound.

The oak tree and the cypress was commissioned by Kurt Edward Kruckeberg for Daniel Abraham Flores. It was premiered at their wedding by the Byrd Ensemble (Markdavin Obenza, conductor) at the Seattle Art Museum on May 2, 2025. It is dedicated with love, hope, and joy to them on their wedding day.

Performance notes

- If you don't have access to Tingsha bells, finger cymbals will work in a pinch.
- This probably goes without saying but, when the harmonies are closer, shore up the vibrato where possible to let stuff shimmer a bit.

"This illegal copy will self destruct in 5...4...3..."

The text

On Marriage

By Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

Then Almitra spoke again and said, And what of Marriage, master?

And he answered saying:

You were born together, and together you shall be forevermore.

You shall be together when the white wings of death scatter your days.

Ay, you shall be together even in the silent memory of God.

But let there be spaces in your togetherness,

And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:

Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.

Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.

For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.

And stand together yet not too near together:

For the pillars of the temple stand apart,

And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

"This illegal copy will self destruct in 5...4...3..."

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The oak tree and the cypress

Text by
Kahlil Gibran

Music by
Joshua Shank

Narrator: Then Almitra spoke again and said, And what of Marriage, master? And he answered saying:

3 placid; quarter = 60

Tingsha bell strike (let ring)

f

Tenor solo: *mp* comfortable

You were born — to- geth- er, —

p sneak in behind the bells; stagger breathe

SA

(m)

p sneak in behind the bells; stagger breathe

TB

(m)

6

9

Soprano solo: *mp* comfortable

You shall be — to-

geth- er you shall be for - ev - er- more.

10

geth-er _____ when the white wings of death scat-ter your days.

15

Ay, _____ you shall be _____ to-gether _____ e - ven in the si - lent

mf exaggerated gliss.

20

22

mf But let there be spa - ces in your to - geth - er - ness,

mf mem - ry of God. But let there be spa - ces in your to - geth - er - ness,

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24

25

mf And let the winds of the heav - ens dance be - tween you. *f*

mf And let the winds of the heav - ens dance be - tween you.

Tingsha bell strike on cutoff (let ring)

f oh

f oh

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"This illegal copy will self destruct in 5...4...3..."

32 serene; quarter = 73

S *mp* Love one a - no - ther, but make not a bond of love: Let it ra-ther be a

A *mp* Love one a - no - ther, but make not a bond of love: Let it ra-ther be a

T *mp* Love one a - no - ther, but make not a bond of love: Let it ra-ther be a

B *mp* Give your hearts, Give your hearts,

42 quarter = 60

37 *f* mov-ing sea be-tween the shores of your souls.

f mov-ing sea be-tween the shores of your souls. *p* Fill each o-ther's

f mov-ing sea be-tween the shores of your souls.

mp Give your hearts, *mp* Give your souls. *f*

43 *p*

Fill each o-ther's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one a-no-ther of your
 cup but drink not from one cup. Give one a-no-ther of your bread but

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48 **50** joyous; faster; quarter = 86 *sub.f*

bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and
 eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance to - ge - ther and be
 oh Sing and dance to -

mp background

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Sing and dance and dance and

56 grateful; quarter = 76

53

poco rit. *mp* *mf*

dance _____ but let each one of you be a - lone, _____ E - ven as the strings of a

poco rit. *mp* *mf*

joy - ous, _____ be a - lone _____ E - ven as the

poco rit. *mp* *mf*

ge - ther but be a - let each one of you be a - lone, _____ E - ven as the

poco rit.

sing, and dance and sing,

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58

poco rit.

lute are a - lone _____ though they _____ qui - ver with the same _____

poco rit.

strings are a - lone _____ though they _____ qui - ver with the same _____

poco rit.

strings are a - lone _____ though they _____ qui - ver with the same

poco rit.

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65 *heartfelt; quarter = 75

63 *non. vib.* **G.P.** *P* floating unobtrusively above
 mu - sic. — Give
non. vib. **G.P.** *mf* warmly
 mu - sic. — Give your hearts, but not in - to each
non. vib. **G.P.** *mf* warmly
 mu - sic. — Give your hearts, but not in - to each
G.P. *mf* warmly
 Give your hearts, but not in - to each

69 keep ing, hand,
 o - ther's keep ing, keep - ing For on - ly the hand of Life can
 o - ther's keep ing, keep - ing For on - ly the hand of Life can
 o - ther's keep ing, keep - ing For on - ly the hand of Life can

*Given the 5-part texture, maybe try redistributing the singers equally from here to the end (sorry for any weird clef jumps, y'all).

76

and stand to - ge - ther, to -

similar phrasing (the harmonies will suggest it)
con - tain your hearts and stand to - ge - ther, yet not too

similar phrasing (the harmonies will suggest it)
con - tain your hearts and stand to - ge - ther, yet not too

similar phrasing (the harmonies will suggest it)
con - tain your hearts and stand to - ge - ther, yet not too

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83

ge - ther, to - ge - ther, to - ge - ther, For the pil - lars,

near to - ge - ther: For the pil - lars of the

near to - ge - ther: For the pil - lars of the

near to - ge - ther: For the pil - lars of the

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90

(they) stand a - part,

tem - ple, the tem - ple stand a - part, and the

tem - ple, the tem - ple stand a - part, and the

tem - ple, the tem - ple stand a - part, and the

97

oak tree and the cy-press, (they) grow not in each o - ther's

oak tree and the cy-press grow not in each o - ther's

oak tree and the cy-press grow not in each o - ther's

oak tree and the cy-press grow not in each o - ther's

105

sha - dow, sha - dow, sha - dow,

mp sha - dow, in each o - ther's, in each o - ther's sha - dow, for

mp sha - dow, in each o - ther's, in each o - ther's sha - dow, for

mp sha - dow, in each o - ther's, in each o - ther's sha - dow, for

112

115

for love, for love, for love,

p love, for love, for love, for

p love, for love, for love, for

p love, for love, for love, for

