

Light Years to Lebanon
TB choir (divisi) and piano

CANTUS-009.2

Saunder Choi

pdf download - \$2.50



LIGHT YEARS TO LEBANON

TB choir (divisi) and piano

Saunder Choi

Graphite™

The music from this
publisher is exclusively
distributed by Graphite.
GraphitePublishing.com

CANTUS-009.2

Commissioned for Cantus' The Secret Letter through the generous support of Tom Arneson.

Light Years to Lebanon

TB choir (divisi) and piano

Brian Sonia-Wallace

Saunder Choi

poco rubato (♩ = 60), distant, yearning
pp يا حبيبي

Tenor
ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti,

Bass
ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti,

Piano
pp

poco più mosso *mp* *mf*

T.
ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti oh ya ha -

B.
ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti oh

Pno
p *mf*

The musical score is written in 4/4 time. The Tenor and Bass parts are in a 4-part setting. The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords and melodic lines. The score includes dynamic markings (pp, mp, mf) and performance instructions (poco rubato, poco più mosso). The lyrics are in Arabic and English. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 4.

Light Years to Lebanon

8 *p* *poco rit.....* *pp* **A** *a tempo* (♩ = 63), unfolding

T. - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti. My love, you love the moun - tains, they

B. ya ha - bib ti. My love, they

Pno *p* *pp*

13 *p* *mp*

T. rise for - e - ver, the sun - set, with its pro - - mise, its

B. rise for - e - ver, the sun - set, the sun - set, with its pro - mise of re - u - nion,

Pno *mp*

Light Years to Lebanon

18 *mf* *poco rit.*

T. pro - mise of stars fil - ling the dark space in be -

B. of stars of stars fil - ling the dark space in be -

Pno *mf*



22 *p* *a tempo, più mosso* (♩ = 68) *mp*

T. - tween. ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti,

B. - tween. My love, my love, my love.

Pno *p* *cresc.*

Light Years to Lebanon

26

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

T. ha - bib - - - ti. My love, the

B. My love, you love the smell of su - mac, the

Pno *poco f* *mf*

30

poco f warmly

T. light from the ba - ke - ry win - dows in - vi - ting fam - lies to break their

B. light from the ba - ke - ry win - dows in - vi - ting fam - lies to break their

Pno *poco f*

Light Years to Lebanon

34 *mf* *mp*

T. fasts, as we feed each o - ther kis - ses in the sha - dow of the

B. fasts, as we feed kis - ses in the sha - dow of the

Pno *mf* *mp*

rit. a tempo **C** poco accel. ♩ = 72, with urgency

38 *p* *mf* *sub. p*

T. o - live grove. Our love for - bid - den, se - cret

B. o - live grove. Our love ooh

Pno *p*

Light Years to Lebanon

43

T. ach - ing with a dis - - tance that de - fies time.

B. *mf* ooh oh *mp* Each de-

Pno *mf*

47

T. *mp* *cresc.* Each de - par - ture a glim - mer a - cross the ex - panse of sky,

B. *cresc.* - par - ture a glim - mer of tears a - cross the ex - panse of sky,

Pno *mp* *poco f*

Light Years to Lebanon

poco stringendo

50

T. *السماء*
as - sa - ma

B. sky. as - sa - ma

Pno

D **a tempo, passionately**

53

T. *f*
Light years to Le - ba - non, we keep climb - ing. Our love, a moun - tain

B. *f*
oh we keep climb - ing. Our love, a moun - tain

Pno *f*

Light Years to Lebanon

56

T. *mp* *mf*
pier - cing the ho - ri - zon, where sun and sea kiss all the sha - dows a - way, a -

B. *mp*
pier - cing the ho - ri - zon, where sun and sea kiss the sha - dows a - way

Pno *mp*



60

T. *f*
- way. Light years to Le - ba - non, un - der a shared

B. *mf* *poco f*
Ya ha - bib - ti Light years un - der a shared

Pno *mf* *f*

Light Years to Lebanon

63 *meno f*

T. sky. Burn with hun - ger, we trek through the

B. sky. *meno f bring out* Burn - ing with salt and hun - ger, we trek through the

Pno *meno f*

66 *mf* *p* *rit.....*

T. dark and fol - low an - nu - jum

B. *mf* *mp* *p* dark and fol - low the stars. an - nu - jum

Pno *mf* *p* *pp*

Light Years to Lebanon

E

Tempo I ♩ = 60

pp

70

T. *pp*
ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti,

B. *pp*
ha - bib ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti, ha -

Pno

poco più mosso

mf

VOCAL ENSEMBLE

نتلقى

poco f

74

T. *mf* *poco f*
ha - bib - ti oh nel ta - 'a nel ta -

B. *mf*
- bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti oh, nel ta - 'a, ha - bib - ti

Pno *mf*

Light Years to Lebanon

78 $\text{♩} = 72$, opening up *mp* *poco rall.*

T. *mp*
 - 'a sa - ma - wet daw - i - ye, ya ha - bib - ti

B. *poco f* *mp*
 سنوات ضوئية
 sa - ma - wet daw - i - ye, ya ha - bib - ti, ya ha - bib - ti

Pno *poco f* *mp*

F a tempo $\text{♩} = 72$, expansive, broadly *f* **VOCAL ENSEMBLE**

82 *f*

T. *f*
 Light years to Le - ba - non, we keep climb - ing. Our love, a moun - tain

B. *f*
 ah oh we keep climb - ing. Our love, a moun - tain

Pno *f*

Light Years to Lebanon

85

T. *mp* *mf*
pier - cing the ho - ri - zon, where sun and sea kiss all the sha - dows a - way, a -

B. *mp*
pier - cing the ho - ri - zon, where sun and sea kiss the sha - dows a - way

Pno *mp*

89

T. *f*
- way. Light years to Le - ba - non, un - der a shared sky.

B. *mf* *poco f*
Ya ha - bib - ti Light years un - der a shared sky.

Pno *mf* *f*

Light Years to Lebanon

93 *meno f* *rit.....* *mp*

T. *8* Burn with hun - ger, we trek through the dark, the_

B. *meno f bring out* *mp*
Burn - ing with salt and hun - ger, we trek through the dark, the_

Pno *meno f* *mf*

97 *a tempo* *rit.....*

T. *8* dark and fol - low the stars, stars, stars, stars_

B. *p* *3* dark and fol - low the stars, stars, stars, stars.

Pno *mp* *p*

Light Years to Lebanon

G ♩ = 63, reflective

103 *p* *poco cresc.*

T. My love, you love the moun - tains, they rise for - e - ver, The sun - set, _____

B. My love, you love the moun - tains, they rise for - e - ver, The sun - set, the _____

Pno *pp*

109 *mp* *rit.* *a tempo* *pp* *molto rit.*

T. _____ with its pro - mise, pro - mise of re - u - nion. Ya ha - bib - ti.

B. sun - set with its pro - mise of re - u - nion. Ya ha - bib - ti.

Pno *mp* *pp*

Text and Translation

Light Years to Lebanon (*From Lama to Razan*)
By Brian Sonia-Wallace

*My love, you love
the mountains, they rise forever,
the sunset, with its promise
of reunion, of stars
filling the dark space
in between.*

*My love, you love
the smell of sumac, the light
of bakery windows inviting families
to break their fasts, as we
feed each other kisses
in the shadow
Of the olive grove.*

*Our love forbidden, secret, aching
with a distance that defies time.
Each departure a glimmer of tears
across the expanse of sky.*

*Light years to Lebanon,
we keep climbing
our love a mountain
Piercing the horizon
where sun and sea kiss
All the shadows away.*

*Light years to Lebanon
under a shared sky
burning with salt and hunger
we trek through the dark
and follow the stars.*

*My love, you love
the mountains, they rise forever,
the sunset, with its promise
of reunion*

Arabic text and translation
(Lebanese dialect):

ya habibti - my dear (feminine)
/ja ɥa'bib.ti/

assama - the sky
/as.sa'ma/

annujum - the stars
/an.nu'ʒum/

nel ta'a - we meet
/nɪl ta'ʔa/

samawet dawiyē - light years
/'sa.ma.wet dao'ʔi.ye/

From the Composer

The tradition of queer love letters always intersects with the idea of distance. Just as queer people meet themselves twice in the process of coming out, they also encounter longing twice—first for the impossible lover (the unrequited love, the straight crush), and then for the lover who becomes unreachable due to time, distance, or circumstance. It is a love that is both familiar and estranged.

Light Years to Lebanon explores this kind of love. It stems from a fragment of a love story shared with writer Brian Sonia-Wallace during West Hollywood Pride, as part of his Pride Poets installation, where LGBTQ+ poets are invited to write for Pride attendees based on their personal stories. A young woman from Lebanon, now living in the United States, asked Brian to write for her partner, who remains in Lebanon. Her longing was palpable—an ache not just for a distant lover, but also for a beloved homeland and a life that had to be kept secret.

Yet, more than anything, her story beamed with hope—a hope that when love burns bright enough, it can bend space and time, and travel light years. With her permission, the resulting poem has been set to music.

This work was commissioned for Cantus' *The Secret Letter* through the generous support of Tom Arneson. It was premiered in the Twin Cities in April 2025. Special thanks to acclaimed tenor Haitham Haidar for help with the Arabic text. There are two versions, the original for TTBB, a cappella, and another version simplified for TB choir (with occasional divisi) and piano.

Biography

Saunders Choi is an award-winning Filipino composer and choral artist based in Los Angeles. He is the 2024 recipient of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Raymond Brock Prize for Professional Composers. His music has been performed internationally by ensembles including Conspirare, Philippine Madrigal Singers, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Pacific Chorale, Cantus, and the Choral Arts Society of Washington.

As an arranger and orchestrator, he has written for Tony Award-winner Lea Salonga, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Orquestra Filarmónica Portuguesa, San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, and the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles.

Saunders also performs professionally with Pacific Chorale, L.A. Choral Lab, and HEX Vocal Ensemble. His studio singing work includes major film scores such as *The Lion King* (2019), *Mulan* (2020), *Turning Red* (2022), *Nope* (2022), *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), and *Superman* (2025).

He views music as advocacy, using his work to center issues of immigration, racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, climate justice, and his identity as a Filipino-Chinese artist. He serves as Director of Music at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Santa Monica and is a teaching artist with the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

www.saunderschoi.com