

Above Gravity
GP - V007
SATB div. a cappella

Ellen Gilson Voth

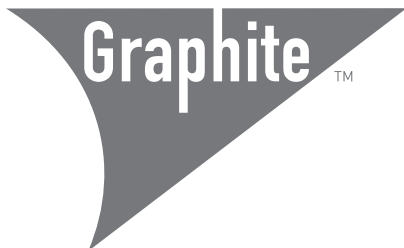
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Ellen Gilson Voth

Above Gravity

for SATB div. choir a cappella

Winner of the 2020 Cincinnati Camerata Composition Prize



notable. elevated.

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Text:

I have spent
the better part
of my life out-of-doors
but yesterday I heard a new sound above my head,
a rustling, ruffling quietness in the air.

When I turned my face upward
I saw a flock of blackbirds
rounding a curve I didn't know was there
and the sound was simply all those wings
against gravity
the whole flock taking a long, wide turn.

We live and move and have
our being
here, in this curving, soaring world
so that when
even rarely, we manage to unite
and move together
toward a common good,

we can think to ourselves:

this is how it's meant to be.

The whole flock taking a long, wide turn
as if of one body and one mind.

*- Excerpt from the poem "Blackbirds"
by Julie Cadwallader Staub.
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From the Composer:

In the winter of 2017, Bob Gathany, former photographer for the Huntsville (AL) Times, was able to capture early evening footage of a massive flock of blackbirds in flight. The effect he filmed is called murmuration - a dazzling acrobatic display of birds swirling and creating fluid formations in air, seeming to defy laws of nature. It is believed that, as each bird reacts and responds to the subtle movements of birds near them, they create synchronized waves which in turn allow them to better communicate food sources, and offer protection as they fly en masse.

Julie Cadwallader Staub's poem captures this image in words - "the whole flock taking a long, wide turn, as if of one body and one mind." What if nature were our teacher in this case? How do we rise above the gravity of self-absorption, of division? How would our current world be different if our first priority was not our own freedom or well-being, but the good of others?

The opening of this piece is written to suggest fluttering of wings underlying the soprano introduction of the story; in the second section, solo lines are shared with tenors and altos, while the undulating accompaniment continues. The homophonic middle section leads us to the heart of Cadwallader Staub's poem - that we are inextricably joined, achieving together what we cannot do alone. The final section paints a picture of the flock and the "long, wide turn", before the flock fades from view.

If desired, the opening polyphonic sections (ms. 1-21, ms. 21-43, or both) can be sung by a smaller group of singers, with a tutti entrance at ms. 43 (or earlier, at the pickup to ms. 35). I encourage conductors to explore visual imagery to accompany performance (photos or videos of murmuration, or of blackbirds in flight), offering a multi-sensory experience for the audience.

- Ellen Gilson Voth, 2025

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Winner of the 2020 Cincinnati Chamber Composition Prize

Above Gravity

for SATB div. choir a cappella

Julie Cadwallader Staub

Ellen Gilson Voth

♩ = c. 54

Soprano *notable. elevated.*

"du" to be sung lightly throughout
p TM

Alto *p*
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

Tenor *p*
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

Bass *p*
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

Piano *for rehearsal only*

6 *mf*

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I have spent the bet-ter part of my life out-of-doors

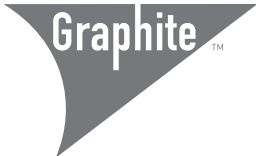
A *du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du*

T *du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du*

B *du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du*

mp *notable. elevated.* *p* *mp*

Graphite TM



notable. elevated.

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S
but yes - ter - day I heard a new sound a - bove my head _____ a

A
du du du du du du du du du du du du

T
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

B
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

p *mp* *p*

16

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rus - tling, ruf - fling qui - et - ness in the air. _____

A
du du du du du du du du du du du du

T
du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

B
du du du du du du du du du du du

pp *mp* *pp* *mp*

43 *mf warmly*

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S We live and move and have our be - ing here, _____ in this curv - ing soar - ing

mf warmly

A We live and move and have our be - ing here, _____ in this curv - ing soar - ing

mf warmly

T We live and move and have our be - ing here, _____ in this curv - ing soar - ing

mf warmly

B We live and move and have our be - ing here, _____ in this curv - ing soar - ing

48 *slight rit. a tempo*

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S world _____ so that when, e - ven rare - ly, we man - age to u - nite and move to - geth - er

p mp

A world _____ so that when, e - ven rare - ly, we man - age to u - nite and move to - geth - er

p mp

T world _____ so that when, e - ven rare - ly, we man - age to u - nite and move to - geth - er

p mp

B world _____ so that when, e - ven rare - ly, we man - age to u - nite and move to - geth - er

54

mf

S toward a com - mon good, we can think to our - selves: this is how it's meant to be. _____

A toward a com - mon good, we can think to our - selves: this is how it's meant to be. _____

T toward a com - mon good, we can think to our - selves: this is how it's meant to be. _____

B toward a com - mon good, we can think to our - selves: this is how it's meant to be. _____

59

mp *p* *mf*

rubato **a tempo primo**

S this is how it's meant to be. _____ The whole flock tak - ing a long, wide turn, _____

A this is how it's meant to be. _____ The

T this is how it's meant to be. _____ fly

B this is how it's meant to be. _____ fly

65

For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

S The whole flock tak - ing a long, wide turn,

A whole flock tak - ing a long, wide turn, The whole flock tak - ing -

T ing, fly - ing, fly - ing,

B ing, fly -

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

Unleashing...

70

For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

S fly, fly,

A a long, wide turn, fly - ing, fly -

T fly, fly - ing,

B ing, fly - ing, fly -

mf *mp* *mf* *mp*

7

77

For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

S *mp* fly - ing, as if of one bod - y and one mind.

A *p* ing. [m]

T *p* fly - ing, [m]

B *p* - - ing, [m]

notable. elevated.

88

For perusal purposes only. Do not copy.

S *mp* *p*

A *mp* du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du du

T *pp* du du

B *mp* *p* *pp* du du du du du du du du du du du du

notable. elevated.

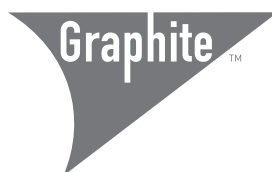
Ellen Gilson Voth



Active as a conductor and composer, Ellen Gilson Voth composes works that reflect her passion for and commitment to high standards of artistry in writing for the human voice. Praised for music that is “superbly crafted for singer and accompanist,” Voth’s works have been commissioned and premiered by a wide range of professional, semi-professional and amateur choirs across the US, and featured at regional and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association and College Music Society. Her art song and short opera works have garnered national attention as well. An experienced educator and clinician, she regularly presents workshops and coaches emerging composers on the art and craft of composition. Voth received her DMA degree from The Hartt School, University of Hartford, and currently lives with her husband and daughter in West Hartford, CT. To learn more about her work, visit www.ellengilsonvoth.net.

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