

The Oxen
SSAA with optional accompaniment
CANTUS-004.2

The Oxen

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THE OXEN

SSAA with optional accompaniment

Alexander Nishibun

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Text

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

From the Composer

Thomas Hardy's "The Oxen" reflects the disillusionment of post-World War I Britain, where traditional beliefs clashed with modern skepticism. Set at midnight on Christmas Eve, the poem portrays Hardy's nostalgia for childhood faith in the oxen kneeling in reverence. However, in adulthood, Hardy doubts the validity of such miracles revealing a society questioning long-held beliefs as it grapples with the aftermath of war.

This sentiment resonates profoundly with me. I was raised a devote Christian, yet I struggle to reconcile the world's suffering with the idea of a loving deity. I suspect that many – Christian or otherwise – can relate to the challenge of faith in our time.

Despite the skepticism, Hardy's poem speaks to a universal human desire: to find comfort amidst uncertainty. I set this poem as a musical reflection of that longing and dedicated it to my son "hoping it might be so."

Biography

ALEXANDER NISHIBUN is a composer and tenor whose works focus on choral and vocal chamber music, often noted for their clarity, warmth, and intuitive vocal writing. Drawing on his experience as a professional singer, Nishibun writes music that is crafted with the performer in mind — melodic lines that are both expressive and singable.

His works have been featured by CANTUS, the premier low voice ensemble in the United States, and performed across their national touring season. His arrangements — including "Es ist ein Ros entsprungen" with water glasses – a setting of Thomas Hardy's "The Oxen" — and original compositions have earned acclaim for their emotional depth and stylistic restraint. As the *Star Tribune* wrote: "For those seeking calm...you can find it in Nishibun's mesmerizing [music]... in spine-tingling fashion."

Before joining Cantus, Nishibun enjoyed a vibrant performing career with ensembles such as the HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY and SKYLARK VOCAL ENSEMBLE. He holds a Master of Music from the New England Conservatory of Music.

CANTUS-004.2

to Oliver

The Oxen

SSAA with optional accompaniment

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Alexander Nishibun (b. 1987)

Gently ♩ = 84

D4 Handbell

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto 1

Alto 2

Organ (opt.)
Ped. ad lib.

p

Ooh, Ooh, ooh,

Ooh, ooh, Ooh,

Ooh, Ooh, Ooh,

Ooh, ooh, ooh,

p

Ooh, Ooh, Ooh,

Ooh, ooh, ooh,

Ooh, Ooh, Ooh,

Ooh, ooh, ooh,

The Oxen

Bell

S. 1 *mf*
Ooh, Christ - mas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

S. 2 *mp*
ooh, Doo, doo,

A. 1 *mp*
Ooh, Doo, doo,

A. 2 *mp*
ooh, Doo, doo,

Org. (opt.)

S. 1 *sim.*
"Now they are all on their knees," an eld - er said as we sat in a flock by the

S. 2 *sim.*
doo, doo, doo, doo,

A. 1 *sim.*
doo, doo, doo, doo,

A. 2 *sim.*
doo, doo, doo, doo,

Org. (opt.)

The Oxen

15 *mp*

S. 1 em - bers of hearth - side ease. Doo,

S. 2 doo, doo, em - bers of hearth - side ease. We *mf*

A. 1 doo, doo, em - bers of hearth - side ease. We *mf*

A. 2 doo, doo, em - bers of hearth - side ease. Doo, *mp*

Org. (opt.)

20 *mf*

S. 1 doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, nor

S. 2 pic - tured the meek mild crea - tures where they dwelt in their straw - y pen, nor

A. 1 pic - tured the meek mild crea - tures where they dwelt in their straw - y pen, nor

A. 2 doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, nor *mf*

Org. (opt.)

The Oxen

24

S. 1
did it oc - cur to one of us there to doubt_ they were kneel - ing then, kneel - ing

S. 2
did it, did it oc - cur to doubt they were kneel - ing then, kneel - ing

A. 1
did it oc - cur to doubt_ they were kneel - ing, kneel - ing

A. 2
did it oc - cur to doubt_ they were kneel - ing, kneel - - ing

Org. (opt.)

29 *mp*

S. 1
then. Doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo,

S. 2
then. Doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo,

A. 1
then. Doo,

A. 2
then. *mf* So fair a fan - cy few would weave in these years! Yet, I

Org. (opt.)

The Oxen

35 *mf*

S. 1 Yet, I feel, If some - one said on Christ - mas Eve, "Come see the ox - en kneel," —

S. 2 Yet, I feel, If some - one said on Christ - mas Eve, "Come see the ox - en kneel," —

A. 1 *mf* I feel, "Come; see the ox - en kneel," —

A. 2 *mf* feel, I feel, "Come; see the ox - en kneel," —

Org. (opt.)

41 *p* *mp*

S. 1 ——— Doo ——— our *mp*

S. 2 *p* ——— Doo, ——— our *mp*

A. 1 *mp* ——— "In the low - ly bar - ton* by yon - der coomb* our child - hood, our

A. 2 *mp* ——— "In the low - ly bar - ton* by yon - - der coomb* our child - hood, our

Org. (opt.)

The Oxen

47 *rit.*..... *f*

S. 1 child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood used to know,"

S. 2 child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood used to know,"

A. 1 child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood used to know,"

A. 2 child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood, our child - hood used to know,"

Org. (opt.)

52 *a tempo* *rit.*.....

S. 1 Doo, _____ hop - ing it might be so.

S. 2 Doo, _____ hop - ing it might be so.

A. 1 Doo, _____ hop - ing it might be so.

A. 2 I should go with him in the gloom, hop - ing it might be so.

Org. (opt.)