

O Savior, Tear the Heavens Wide

(O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf)

by Hugo Distler

Der Jahreskreis, Opus 5

"A collection of 52 two- and three-part sacred compositions
for the use of church, school, and amateur choruses"

C. J. Pearson, Ed.

Der Jahrkreis was dedicated to Axel Werner Kühl,
Pastor at St. Jakobi church, Lübeck,
"with special lasting memories of joint efforts."

Foreword

Der Jahrkreis ["The Cycle of the Year"], a collection of 52 two- and three-part sacred pieces for chorus, came into being through my work as a church musician as an effort to meet the general need for simple, contemporary music for worship. It is intended to serve the countless small, mixed, volunteer church choirs as well as the children's choirs still common in many regions, particularly in northern Germany.

In the settings for mixed chorus, the men's part, notated throughout in the bass clef for clarity, is always given a modest range. This offers the conductor the opportunity to sing it himself along with the two children's parts if sufficient voices are lacking. (I myself have performed the majority of these settings in this way, making presentation possible with limited forces.)

This does not mean that only a few of the motets also permit the use of larger forces. On the contrary, some of them, like nearly all freely composed motets, have technical and musical challenges that appear to require a fuller ensemble. Through appropriate transposition, which is permitted with each setting and in many cases may be necessary to allow the motet to fit into the worship framework, most of the settings notated for equal voices can be made suitable for mixed voices and *vice versa*.

The underlayment of texts and the working of the chorales into the liturgical year is in many cases just the personal recommendation of the editor; it is possible, of course, to set the tunes to texts other than those given, insofar as they do not contradict the character of the setting in question. It is not necessary to perform the entire motet each time, with all its verses and various settings; in most cases, the considerable number of verses provided here is intended as a basis for selection.

One could always begin by performing the simplest settings. It should be noted, however, that the two-part settings are not always the easiest. For practical reasons, I have always composed the two-part settings, which are placed in the second position, to the text of the second verse of the chorale in question: The change from the three-part version (first verse), to a two-part setting (second verse), and the rondo-like return to the original, three-part version (as a final, third, verse), yields a unified, artistically satisfying form of larger scale. (When only the two-part settings of the chorales are to be sung, one must obviously begin with the text of the first verse.)

In order to guarantee the most freedom possible in performance, I have almost entirely avoided the use of any tempo or dynamic markings, except in the case of the free motets. The tempo of the chorale motets should be the customary tempo of the chorale. Take care, however, to avoid tempos that are too slow. When the time signature changes hold to the rule ♩ = ♪ unless otherwise indicated.

In the "Te Deum" the half of the verse written for a single voice part may be sung by a soloist, by the choir, or as a clerical responsory (transposed for male voice). The same holds for the Passion hymn "In Dark of Night" and similar settings, where either choir and choir or choir and solo voice alternate. Solo performance of whole motets is also possible in most cases.

The author suggests that appropriate instruments be considered to double the voices (either selected parts or *in toto*). Instruments might be used as well to replace individual voices or to play the entire setting as an instrumental piece. Such use of instruments is advisable, of course, only if the setting in question seems not too directly shaped by the rhythm of the words. Some of the equal-voice and, through appropriate transposition, mixed-voice settings are also suitable for performance by male choirs.

Where textual underlay is self-explanatory, rhythms should not be altered. The singing of two notes of the same pitch on the same syllable is sometimes necessary and always requires a very slight break after the first to clarify the second.

One can create complete cycles of chorale-based masses through the thoughtful combination of several appropriate motets.

Lübeck, April, 1933, Hugo Distler
Tr. Dr. Gordon Paine

1. O Savior, Tear the Heavens Wide

O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf

Köln, 1621

Advent

Hugo Distler

Sop. 1

1. O Sav - ior, tear the hea -
 3. O earth, break out in ev' -
 5. O bright - est Sun, O sweet -

Sop. 2

1. O Sav - ior, tear the hea - vens
 3. O earth, break out in ev' - - - ry
 5. O bright - est Sun, O sweet - est

Alto

1. O Sav - ior, tear the hea - vens wide!
 3. O earth, break out in ev' - ry vale
 5. O bright - est Sun, O sweet - est Star,

5

- vens wide! come down from hea - ven to a -
 - - ry vale a car pet green on hill and
 - est Star, we long to see You from a -

wide! come down from hea - ven to a -
 vale a car - pet green on hill and
 Star, we long to see You from a -

come down from hea - ven to a - bide!
 a car - pet green on hill and dale,
 we long to see You from a - far!

With just a few of these settings the notation indicates the polyrhythmic independence of the individual voices. (H.D.) [These have been rebarred for simplicity and the polyrhythms indicated by brackets. Ed.]

1. O Savior, Tear the Heavens Wide

10

bide! The gates of hea - ven tear a - way; break
dale, O earth, the sweet - est flower bring forth. O
far! O Sun, as - cend! With - out Your light, we

bide! The gates of hea - ven tear a - way; break
dale, O earth, the sweet - est flower bring forth. O
far! O Sun, as - cend! With - out Your light we

The gates of hea - ven tear a - way; break
O earth, the sweet - est flower bring forth. O
O Sun, as - cend! With - out Your light we

14

down where locks and bars hold sway!
Sav - ior, from the earth spring forth!
all a - bide in dark - est night.

down where locks and bars hold sway! 2. O God,
Sav - ior, from the earth spring forth! 4. Where are
all a - bide in dark - est night. 6. On earth

down where locks and bars hold sway! 2. O God, in
Sav - ior, from the earth spring forth! 4. Where are You,
all a - bide in dark - est night. 6. On earth we

18

2. O God, in heav'n - ly dew pour down,
4. Where are You, Com - fort - er div - ine,
6. On earth we suf - fer pain and strife,

— in heav'n - ly dew pour down, in dew, O
— You, Com - fort - er div - ine, to whom all
— we suf - fer pain and strife, and death ap -

heav'n - ly dew pour down, in dew, O Sav - ior
Com - fort - er di - vine, to whom all earth its
suf - fer pain and strife, and death ap - pears the

23

in dew, O Sav - ior _____ to us flow! O clouds, let fall and bring
to whom all earth its _____ hopes in - cline? O come, come down from hea -
and death ap - pears the _____ goal of life: but come and lead us by _____

Sav - ior to _____ us flow! O clouds, let fall and
earth its hopes _____ in - cline? O come, come down from
pears the goal _____ of life: but come and lead us

to _____ us flow!
hopes _____ in - cline?
goal _____ of life: O clouds, let fall and
O come, come down from
but come and lead us

28

_____ in rain a King o'er Ja - cob's house to reign!
- - ven's hall and com - fort us _____ who on You call!
_____ the hand from weep - ing to _____ Your heav'n - ly land!

bring in rain a King o'er Ja - cob's house to reign!
hea - ven's hall and com - fort us _____ who on You call!
by the hand from weep - ing to _____ Your heav'n - ly land!

bring in rain a King o'er Ja - cob's house to reign!
hea - ven's hall and com - fort us _____ who on You call!
by the hand from weep - ing to _____ Your heav'n - ly land!