

A STUDY OF DAVID CONTE'S
SECULAR SATB CHORAL WORKS
WITH NON-ORCHESTRAL SCORE COMPLEMENT

by

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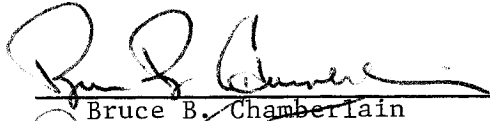
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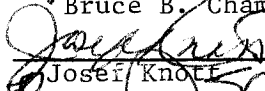
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ABSTRACT

The choral works of David Conte are becoming an ever-increasing part of the American choral repertoire. These works have been performed on numerous choral convention programs and college choral concerts, and by professional choral organizations throughout the United States. Conte's choral compositions have been commercially recorded by several of the world's premier vocal ensembles such as Chanticleer, the American Repertory Singers, Electra Women's Ensemble, and the St. Olaf College Choir. In addition Conte's works are being commissioned by a wide array of groups from top-level high schools and universities to nationally-recognized choral ensembles.

To date the only doctoral study that has focused on the music of David Conte is that of Sabrina Lynn Adrian at the University of Texas. Her dissertation focused on his compositions for organ as part of a study of twentieth-century American organ compositions. My study will focus upon one aspect of Conte's choral output: his secular SATB choral works with non-orchestral complement. Special focus will be on the manner in which Conte sets and portrays the text in his works, since it is the text that he cites as being the inspiration for each composition. The pieces will be examined for the harmonic language and various compositional techniques employed to convey the

meaning of individual words and the overall emotional progression that the text creates.

Based on the information attained through this examination and through surveys sent out to various choral directors, the works will be evaluated as to their level of difficulty and to any inherent problems that would need to be addressed in the rehearsal process.

INTRODUCTION

The choral works of David Conte are becoming an ever-increasing part of the American choral repertoire. These works have been performed on numerous choral convention programs and college choral concerts, and by professional choral organizations throughout the United States. In an interview for *Fanfare*, Leo Nestor, choral director at the Catholic University of America and director of the American Repertory Singers, said, "I think David Conte is a person we need to pay more attention to... You can tell he knows exactly what he's doing with the voice too [*sic*]." ¹Among those who are programming Conte's pieces there is a consensus that the text setting and harmonic language are the key features that draw one to his work. Despite this growing acceptance of Conte's work into the body of standard American choral literature, there has been no major research that deals with the choral writing of Conte. This document will be the first, and in it I will examine Conte's salient style features as they pertain to his secular SATB choral works with non-orchestral complement. The manner in which he sets the text and portrays its meaning will be the focal point of this paper. Through the insights gained in this study I will provide the reader with an analytical guide to the subject pieces for future presentations of these compositions.

¹James Reel, "A Conversation with Choral Conductor Leo Nestor," *Fanfare – The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 23:4 (March-April 2000): 121-122.

CHAPTER 1

CONTE'S COMPOSITIONAL PRACTICES

David Conte states:

I was always interested in theater. When I was a teenager I stopped studying piano as seriously as I had. This was between the age of eleven and thirteen. I got bored. I got interested in writing. I loved movies and plays. I wanted to be a journalist, and then once I got into high school, maybe age fourteen, I got back into the piano and I started practicing about five hours a day. So what really happened was as an adolescent I lost focus in music, but it was for a short period.²

It is this love of words that is so much a part of Conte's musical voice today.

During discussions with the composer he elaborated upon his choice of text and the influence that it has on everything in his work from the meter and tempo to the style and formal design. Conte feels that the poetry tells the composer much of what needs to be known in order to create a successful work, if he will just take the time to let the words speak to him. In his opinion, "Everything comes from the text."³ In a poem that mentions "leaping, green-spirited trees," the words themselves create a certain energy. To set this text in a soft, calm manner would seem to be contrary to the meaning.

I think many composers use the words for a scaffolding for their own ideas. What I try to do is get what the poem is really saying. It's not even a matter of opinion necessarily. What's the rhythm of the words? Do the adjectives and verbs have a lot of vigor in tempo?⁴

² David Conte, interview by author, 29 July 2002, transcript, San Francisco, CA.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David Conte, interview by author, 31 December 2002, transcript, San Francisco, CA.

Conte feels that finding the appropriate text for each commission is the most important step in his compositional process. It is also often the most time-consuming. When asked what he looks for in a text, Conte responded that he is often drawn to poetry that is in the first person plural (we), feeling that this is especially suitable for chorus. He cites Handel's *All We like Sheep* as a prime example of a choral work based on the first person plural. Conte also observes that many of the psalms are set in the first person plural, and it is this inclusiveness that makes them so adaptable to the choral genre. He himself has set several of the psalm texts to music.

Another element that often influences his choice of text is the use of the imperative mood (verb form denoting commands) such as "Praise ye the Lord." Conte believes the imperative mood has a heightened intention that provides forward motion and lends itself to vocal interpretation. The imperative mood is, incidentally, found in many of the psalms, thus combining the two elements already mentioned into one poetic setting. In Conte's composition *In Praise of Music* there are phrases by Shelley such as "Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine, loosen the notes in a silver shower" that are in the imperative and provide energy to the line of text.

Intelligibility of the text is also important to Conte's selection. Conte feels a composer must take great care not to set the text in a way that makes it overly difficult for

the listener or performer to retain a sense of the original poetic thought, even when it is presented over several lines. He believes that some of the texts he has set by Robert Herrick or John Stirling Walker are of the style that carry a thought over several lines, yet still maintain the cohesiveness of the thought.

There are also poems that make a single statement, such as those used in several of Handel's *Messiah* choruses. Though these choruses present the idea in a sublime manner, this is not the poetic form that Conte finds compelling. Instead he often chooses texts that are more complex, that take the speaker through an emotional progression. Conte cites this progression as determining form. In a lecture on his composition *Psalm 121* he compares its poetic form to that of the *sonata allegro* form where there is the introduction that establishes the tone, mood, and tonality. This is followed by the exposition in which the question and answer of the text bring about a tonal shift. The development consists of a modulatory list of ways in which God helps and comforts. Following a brief organ transition there is a recapitulation using a unison statement of the A theme.⁵ It is this textural drama that offers Conte a rich source of inspiration for his works. In *Charm Me Asleep* the speaker goes through an emotional progression on his way to death. He first entreats music to calm his fever and then proceeds to beg for

⁵ David Conte, "Psalm 121 Lecture," Evergreen Church Music Conference, Evergreen, CO, 1995.

release as he requests music to calm his sleep (a metaphor for death). The emotional progression continues as the speaker's soul "with full delight leaving this light" (the earth) takes its flight to heaven.

There are also texts that Conte feels he has not yet found a successful way to set. The work of the twentieth century poet W. H. Auden falls into this group. Though Conte cites Auden as one of his favorite poets, he finds much of Auden's work too didactic in tone and therefore problematic as a text choice.

The next step in Conte's composition process is to memorize the chosen text. Conte memorizes poetry as a hobby and can recite hundreds of poems. He finds this activity not only very satisfying, but also extremely instructive as the structure and prosody of the poem reveal themselves in the process of memorization. Conte states that by memorizing a poem:

It reveals the organic flow and emotional trajectory in the poem, meaning what happens, who's speaking, to whom are they speaking, are they going through any changes, are they in a different place at the end than they were at the beginning? Because all of this is going to influence my musical choices. The words pull the music so the music is pulled out of the words.⁶

After memorization, Conte makes a list of adjectives that describes the tone of the poem and the scene. Through this process Conte decides if the work should be in major or minor, whether modes should be employed, and whether the meter should be

⁶ Conte, interview, 29 July 2002.

simple, compound, or a combination. He also gains a sense of the tempo, form, and texture that the composition should take. Conte compares the poem to a scene in a movie and decides what character of music would best portray the speaker. The next step is to take the poem and underline all the verbs because he feels it is the verbs that give a work its energy.

Conte does not bring a work fully formed in his head to the keyboard (such as it is believed Mozart did) but rather he comes with a strong sense of the poetic energy. This allows him to feel the poem, to have it “in his body.” He knows where the inflections are and how the words fit in the mouth. This is a very important element of Conte’s compositional process. This memorizing, or “homework” as he calls it, lays the foundation before the actual composing begins. He summarizes his own compositional process in a quotation from Stravinsky saying, “I don’t get inspired to create unless I’m in contact with actual sound.”⁷ It is at the keyboard that the work finally takes its form.

If I have done my homework right and I’ve found the right text for the commission, if I know the text before I start to compose, I mean really know the text-- who’s speaking, to whom are they speaking, if it has a sense of time and place for me. I put that all into my brain and when I sit down to compose it all comes. I work hard but it’s not hard work for me--composing.⁸

During this final phase of composition the work gets its first performance. Conte

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

believes it is important that he perform each part from beginning to end at the desired performance tempo. He sings one part while playing the others. This enables him to experience what the performers will experience as they find their notes in the context of the entire work. Through this process Conte is also able to discover what works in the piece and what does not. "I think, as choral music goes, I am really writing for the singer. I really am. If the singer loves to sing the work then my job is done."⁹

In discussions with Conte the question arose as to whether he ever includes hidden symbolism or musical patterns such as the often-used B-A-C-H motive. Conte replied that he has not, except in one of his most recent works *The Passion of Rita St. James*. In this musical there is a fanatical art teacher who says, "Work with vigor, work with style, let your freedom ring." It was this phrase that inspired him to take the tune of *My Country 'Tis of Thee* and turn it into a chromatic, nine-eight ostinato figure that runs throughout the work. He said that musical puzzles do not interest him, rather it is the intuitive process of finding the right sound that is his focus.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

David Joseph Conte was born December 20, 1955 in Denver, Colorado. His father, Cosmo, was a trumpet player in the Air Force Academy Band and his mother, Nancy, was a singer in the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus under Robert Shaw from 1958-1963. As a child, Conte would attend these chorus rehearsals; however, his formal musical training began with piano lessons at the age of seven. He continued his piano study, except for a brief period during adolescence, into college. It was during his years at Lakewood High School in Lakewood, Ohio that Conte truly found his musical calling. Conte cites the high school choral director, B. Neil Davis, as his most influential musical mentor during this time. In fact, Davis' influence during Conte's formative years is the reason Conte says he composes choral music. Even today Conte says he has never been a member of a better choir. In addition to singing, Conte wrote several arrangements for the choir, band, and orchestra. It was also during this time that Conte got his first opportunity to be in charge of a choral ensemble, directing the high school's folk group. For the occasion of Davis' retirement from the high school in 1985, the Lakewood High Music Parent's Support Organization commissioned Conte to write *The Waking*. Conte returned to his alma mater and conducted the premier of the work.

He next went on to study music at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

Although Conte entered the school as a piano major, during his sophomore year he switched to a double major in voice and piano. It was not until his junior year that he finally settled on a composition major.

At the age of nineteen, while at Bowling Green, Conte wrote his first original choral work, *Cantate Domino*, for the *A Cappella* Choir under the direction of Richard Mathey. The work was favorably received and was chosen by John Ness Beck for publication with Beckenhorst Press (Columbus, OH) in 1975. *Cantate Domino* has since been reassigned to E. C. Schirmer Publishing Company (Boston, MA), with whom Conte has an exclusive contract; he is one of the few composers to have such an arrangement.

While enrolled at Bowling Green, Conte also began studying in France with Nadia Boulanger. This study included two summers at Fontainebleau (1975 and 1976) as well as private studies in Paris in 1976-77 and 1977-78. These two years in Paris were made possible by a Fulbright Scholarship, which began his senior year at Bowling Green. Under Boulanger's tutelage Conte developed a strong belief in education through memorization, a style of teaching he currently employs with his students at the San Francisco Conservatory. Boulanger espoused this method of teaching because of the kinesthetic muscle memory that takes place through the repetition of a piece. Much

of the work Conte did with Boulanger also centered around training the ear through *solfege* and dictation. During the school year Conte received two private lessons per week in Paris and during the summer two lessons a week at Fontainebleau. Each lesson lasted two hours. Between these lessons there were hours of drill among the students playing chords and complicated rhythms to be taken down in dictation. In a group class Boulanger frequently would have someone come to the piano and create a bass line made up of whole tones. The student would then be asked to make a chord progression based on the whole tone scale and then harmonize the progression using minor seventh chords. Once this was accomplished Boulanger might ask to have the bass played with the left hand, the alto with the right, and the tenor line *solfeged*. This trained not only the ear but also the students' understanding of harmony, *solfege*, and improvisation. These studies also led to a certificate in Keyboard Harmony and Score-Reading from the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris in 1977.

After completing his Bachelor of Music Degree *magna cum lauda* in 1978, Conte went on to receive two degrees from Cornell University, a Master of Fine Arts in 1981 and a Doctor of Musical Arts in 1983. At Cornell Conte majored in composition and minored in choral conducting. He studied composition with Karel Husa, Robert Palmer, and Steven Stucky, and choral conducting with Thomas Sokol. During Conte's first year

of doctoral work, the choral director went on sabbatical, and Conte was appointed Acting Director of the Cornell University Glee Club, the Cornell University Chorus, the Cornell University Chamber Singers, and the Cornell University Sage Chapel Choir.

It was also during his studies at Cornell University that Conte began his acquaintance with Aaron Copland. As part of his Masters coursework Conte wrote a paper analyzing Copland's *Piano Quartet*. Upon completion Conte sent it to Copland who liked the paper saying, "I agree with most of what you have written. I was unaware of much of what you said, but I agree with what you said."¹¹ Copland agreed to meet with Conte to discuss the older composer's work further if Conte should happen to be in New York. This led to a meeting with Copland and subsequently Conte's doctoral document written on Copland's 12-tone composition *Sketches of "Inscape."* Conte conducted this research while living at the Copland home during the summer of 1982.

While studying at Cornell University Conte was also exposed to the works of Steve Reich. One of Conte's teachers the musicologist William Austin was influential on Reich while Reich attended Cornell University. Austin discussed Reich's works with Conte playing a recording of *Desert Music* that Reich had sent Austin before the work was premiered in the United States. This work, as well as *Tehillim*, with their minimalistic

¹¹ Ibid.

writing exerted a great influence on Conte's compositions from 1982-86, especially in such works as *The Waking*, *Canticle*, and "Dance" from *Invocation and Dance*. Austin also later introduced Conte to Reich.

Upon completion of his doctorate Conte continued his studies at the Aspen Music Festival in 1984 as one of four conducting fellows. There his main teachers were Fiora Contino and Joel Revzen, with additional training from Alan Harler, Jan Harrington, and William Hall. The summer's study concentrated on the Verdi *Requiem*. A Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellowship followed in 1989 for studies in London. As part of this program Conte studied the manuscripts of Vaughan Williams. This intense study led to noticeable stylistic influences on his writing. Conte would later write an article on Vaughan Williams' "Three Shakespeare Songs" published in the *American Choral Journal* in 2002.

Since completing his studies Conte has received various awards for his work in addition to the already mentioned Vaughan Williams Fellowship, Aspen Music Festival Conducting Fellowship, and Fulbright Fellowship. He has received numerous awards from ASCAP (1990-92, 1995-99, and 2000) as well as several grants from the "Meet the Composer" program (1983, 1986, 1987, 1991, and 1993).

Conte's teaching career began with his appointment to the prestigious Interlochen

Center for the Arts where he served two summers (1979-81) as an Instructor in Composition and Theory. Cornell University appointed Conte as Lecturer in Choral Conducting in the spring semester of 1982 and again in the fall semester of 1984 during which time he also served as Lecturer and Acting Director of Choral Activities at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. From 1983-85 Keuka College in Keuka Park, New York had Conte on their faculty as an Assistant Professor of Music. In 1985 Conte began his tenure at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as Professor of Composition, a position he still holds today. In addition to his work with composition students, Conte teaches graduate theory employing many of the techniques he learned while studying under Nadia Boulanger. In 1988 the San Francisco Symphony gave Conte a one-year commission as Instructor of Musicianship for the chorus. As a conductor, Conte took on the leadership responsibilities for the Bay Area Lutheran Chorale from 1988-91. He has also returned to his love of theatre, working with the Thick Description Theatre Company in San Francisco as its composer-in-residence since 1989.

CHAPTER THREE

OVERVIEW OF TOTAL OUTPUT

Opera

Although Conte says he is primarily a choral composer, his total output covers a wide range of performing genre from orchestral writing to theater scores as well as pieces for solo voice and various solo instruments. In the field of opera Conte has completed two works, *The Dreamers* and *The Gift of the Magi*. His first opera, *The Dreamers*, was commissioned for the Sonoma City Opera Company's sesquicentennial celebration in 1996. The project was made possible with a \$100,000 grant from the Cannard Fund given by the General Vallejo Memorial Association. In collaboration with librettist Phillip Littell, Conte creates an opera telling the story of the founding of the city of Sonoma, California. The opera takes place in August of 1848 and shows the many facets of the historic community. Conte studied many styles of writing to achieve a true flavor of the times from the compositions of Steven Foster to minstrel and folk pieces.¹²

The opera is set in two acts, each of which has two scenes. In between scenes three and four Conte included the piece *Candles in the Wilderness* for SATB choir as an interlude. In his review of *The Dreamers* for *Opera News* Byron Belt wrote:

¹² Gretchen Giles, "Years of Solitude: The Sonoma City Opera's 'The Dreamers' is No Lullaby," *Sonoma Independent*, 13-19 June, 1996.

The Dreamers...left audiences cheering at each of seven sold-out performances...Sonoma Opera's faith in first-time opera composer Conte was fully justified...He has written much vocal and choral music, and his expertise is reflected in *The Dreamers'* most powerful soaring moments, especially in the second half of the three-hour opus.¹³

Conte's second opera, *The Gift of the Magi*, was commissioned by San Francisco Conservatory's New Music Ensemble in 1997. Under the direction of conductor Nicole Paiement, the student ensemble recorded the opera in 2001 and produced a CD under the Arsis label (#141). *The Gift of the Magi* is a one-act chamber opera with a libretto by Nicholas Giardini. It incorporates some influences from popular music that Conte says come from the vocal styles of such artists as Barbra Streisand and Frank Sinatra. Their manner of starting on an eighth note and tying it to a strong beat creates a type of syncopation that Conte uses intermittently throughout the work. This style of writing can also be seen in several of his choral works.

Orchestral Works

To date Conte has written four works for orchestra alone. The first is a ballet in two acts for large orchestra called *The Masque of the Red Death*. This work was begun in 1993 and has yet to be completed, but has been performed as *Orchestral Suite No. 1* by both the San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra in 1993 under Denis de Coteau, and by the Oakland East-Bay Symphony in 1994 under Michael Morgan. Conte's second

¹³ Conte, e-mail correspondence with the author, 8 January 2003.

orchestral work was a 1995 commission for the Oakland East-Bay Symphony *Of a Summer Evening* scored for double orchestra. Allan Ulrich of the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote, “*Of a Summer Evening*, a diverting two-part tone poem for double orchestra, emerged a tuneful, evocative, deftly scored work. The harmonies are clear, the melodies are downright luscious.”¹⁴ *A Copland Portrait* was commissioned by the Dayton Philharmonic in 2000 and was premiered at Dayton Symphony Hall. Conte’s fourth work, *Fantasy for Orchestra*, is based on his 1987 *Piano Fantasy* and was premiered February 13, 2003 by the Stockton Symphony in California.

Choral-orchestral Compositions

Conte has also written numerous works for orchestra that include choral forces. *Requiem Triptych* was composed for orchestra and TTBB choir in 1982. At the same time Conte issued an edition of the work for TTBB choir and piano. It was this piano version that the Cornell University Glee Club performed in England at the King’s Lynn Festival that same year. The Eastern Daily Press of King’s Lynn, England wrote of this performance that, “Outstanding in the set was the *Requiem* of David Conte.”¹⁵ A later performance by Chanticleer caused William Glackin of the *Sacramento Bee* to write:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Requiem Triptych was the longest work on the San Francisco's *Chanticleer* program and the most impressive. The "In Paradisum" section pits high against low effectively in the choir and has some surprisingly beautiful writing for the piano.¹⁶

Invocation and Dance followed in 1985 and was originally written for TTBB chorus, harp, piano four-hands, xylophone, vibraphone, glockenspiel, timpani, and strings. The work was arranged into an SATB version by the composer in 1989 and then further reworked in a second version that could be done without orchestra. Allan Kozinn, of the *New York Times* called "Dance" "a sparkling hymn to life."¹⁷ Philip Campbell of the *Bay Area Reporter* wrote:

Conte's appeal is direct and invigorating, and the reassurance of the writing is pleasurable... the jazzy, joyous Dance is undeniably thrilling, and the performers repaid Conte's efforts with the kind of unabashed enthusiasm composers dream of.¹⁸

Conte's next choral-orchestral piece, *Hymn to the Nativity*, was published in 1987 and calls for a chamber orchestra, soprano soloist, and TTBB choir. This work was commissioned by the Big Apple Performing Arts and was premiered in New York City's Carnegie Hall. In reviewing this work Bill Zakariasen of the *New York Daily News* wrote, "*Hymn to the Nativity*...is truly celestial in its thematic material and in its voicing for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

singers and instrumentalists. For these ears, nothing more beautiful has been written for the Christmas season in recent years.”¹⁹

Composed in 1991, *In Praise of Music* appeared first as a work for SSAA choir and piano commissioned by the Peninsula Women’s Chorus (Patricia Hennings, director). In 1994 Loyola Marymount University, under the direction of Mary Breden, commissioned a reworking of the piece for SATB choir and piano. The work was changed from its SSAA form with the addition of an opening and a final unaccompanied chorale movement, “Celia Singing,” which uses a Thomas Carew (c. 1595-1639) text. Jon Henken of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that “the hushed fragmentary exaltation of the ending and the rapturous sweep of the work’s main portions were caught by the singers.”²⁰ Norman Lombino of the *Peninsula Times Tribune* wrote, “David Conte’s important and impressive *In Praise of Music* belongs in the repertoires of every choral society...”²¹

Conte’s next work was *Elegy for Matthew*. This work appears in editions done by the composer for men’s voices (TTBB chorus, piano or orchestra), or for mixed ensemble

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

(SATB chorus, piano or orchestra). The work was premiered in its TTBB form with orchestra at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1999.

In 1999 Conte was also commissioned to write *American Triptych* by the Reading, Pennsylvania Choral Society. This SATB choral and orchestra composition has yet to be submitted for publication. Conte, upon hearing the twenty-five minute work, decided that it was overly difficult and wished to rework it. He said the premiering choir made an heroic effort in its presentation, but he felt the work was not quite ready for his final approval. The texts are contemporary sacred poems of e.e. cummings, Bliss Carman, and W. S. Merwin.

Eos appeared in 2000. Conte calls this work a choral symphony scored for tenor and baritone soloists, TTBB chorus, and orchestra. The work was commissioned by the Bay City Performing Arts of Boston and was premiered at the New England Conservatory of Music. *Eos* also comes in an edition for tenor and baritone soloists, TTBB chorus and piano four hands.

Conte's most recent work again unites chorus and orchestra. Titled *September Sun* it was commissioned in memory of those who perished in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. St. Bartholmew's Episcopal Church in New York City commissioned the work, under the direction of William Trafka, for the first year anniversary of the

tragedy. The composition consists of four movements and is for SATB chorus and string orchestra. A two-minute prelude scored for strings alone opens the work. The second movement, titled “O Sun,” is for a *cappella* chorus and lasts about six minutes. Choral and orchestral forces combine in the seven-minute third movement, “In New York.” The final movement is a postlude and is an exact repetition of the prelude. Contemporary poet John Stirling Walker wrote the poetry to “O Sun.” Walker also collaborated with Conte on *Elegy for Matthew* and *The Composer* and wrote both the book and lyrics for Conte’s newest musical *The Passion of Rita St. James*. This musical was premiered at San Francisco Conservatory on March 15, 2003.

Instrumental Compositions

Conte has also received commissions for various instrumental complements. He has written several works for piano including *Sonata* for two pianos (1983), *Sonatine* (1977), and *Fantasy* (1987), both for single piano, and his *Piano Quintet* for piano and string quartet, which was commissioned by the Pacific Serenades Concert Series and received its Los Angeles premier in 1990. Conte had been commissioned earlier by the Pacific Serenades Concert Series for his 1988 composition *On a Summer Evening* that was premiered by the Elgart and Yates Guitar Duo. This piece would later be the basis for Conte’s 1995 orchestral work of the same name.

For organ Conte has written several pieces with various instrumental complements. *Antiphon* is a work for organ and brass quartet and was commissioned for the 25th anniversary of the consecration of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. The performing artists for the 1989 premier were organist David Higgs and the San Francisco Symphony Brass Quartet. Subsequent performances have included several presentations at Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco. David Higgs commissioned the 1991 organ composition *Pastoral and Toccata* for performances throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. William Duncan of the *Bermuda Times* wrote, “The *Pastoral and Toccata* exploits to the full the resources of the organ with the flowing line of color in the first movement giving way to a brilliant paeon in the second.”²² The San Francisco Symphony commissioned *Christmas Intrada* in 1991 for its annual Davies Symphony Hall Christmas Concert. It is scored for organ, piano, brass, and percussion. *Meditation on Silent Night* was composed in 1994 for solo organ. In 1996 the Holtkamp Organ Company commissioned the solo organ work *Soliloquy* which premiered at the Cleveland Museum of Art in September of that year.

Theatrical Scores

Conte has had an active role as composer-in-residence for the Thick Description

²² Ibid.

Theatre Company at the Theatre Artaud in San Francisco. His first work was for their production of *Ben-Hur* in 1990. The score for this work combined brass and synthesized keyboard. *Figaro Gets a Divorce* followed in 1991 using synthesized keyboards.

Iphigenia in Aulis also appeared in 1991 and was written for clarinet, saxophone, and synthesized keyboards. The next production was *Electra* (1992) which Conte scored for saxophone quartet and synthesized keyboards. *Santos and Santos* was written in 1993 for string quartet. Conte may also be collaborating with the Thick Description Theatre Company on a yet-to-be-named musical in the summer of 2003.

Solo Vocal Works

Works for solo voice also make up a substantial portion of Conte's output. Some of these have been arranged by the composer for ensembles. His *Alleluia*, for medium voice and piano, was written in 1975. In 1977 it was arranged for two voices and piano under the Beckhorst label. (It was reassigned to E.C. Schirmer in 1987.) He then composed *Three Yeats Settings* in 1983 for soprano and string quartet. His *Sexton Songs*, for medium voice and piano, was an ongoing project from 1991-1997. This was followed in 1998 by a work for baritone and piano, *Everyone Sang*. In 1997 Conte arranged a solo version of his SATB work "Candles in the Wilderness" from his opera *The Dreamers*. This edition was for Milah Werner's memorial service and was performed by baritone

Thomas Hampson and pianist Armen Guzelimian at the University of California at Los Angeles. Ms. Wermer served for many years as chairman of the Metropolitan Opera auditions as well as president of the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra. She discovered Thomas Hampson when he was still a student in his early twenties at the University of Southern California. It was Ms. Wermer who introduced Mr. Hampson to David Conte.²³ Soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson and organist Donald Southerland commissioned *Songs of Consolation* in 1997. They premiered the work in Washington D.C. that same year. In 1999 Conte wrote his *A Stable-lamp is Lighted* on a poem by Richard Wilbur for soprano and piano or organ. This work would later be commissioned for arrangement in three choral versions, TTBB, SSAA, and SATB. Upon receiving a recording of the SATB version, Wilbur (who was also the lyricist for Bernstein's *Candide*) wrote to Conte saying that it was stunning and though others had set the text, Conte's was the finest. Vance George, director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, programmed the SATB version on the 2001 Davies Symphony Hall Christmas Concert.

Choral Works

The largest percentage of Conte's compositional output is in the area of choral music, of which the majority is sacred in nature. Conte's first choral work was his 1975

²³ David Conte, e-mail correspondence with the author, 13 February 2003.

Cantate Domino for double *a cappella* SATB choir. This work, based on Psalm 149, was written for the Bowling Green State University *A Cappella* Choir under the direction of Richard Mathey. Anton Armstrong has since recorded this work with the St. Olaf College Choir on the school's label, St. Olaf Records. In the *Musical Opinion* of London the following appeared:

I hope that I may never be accused of insularity, but our own English choral repertoire is so very good that it is seldom that one feels able to suggest any new work from the other side of the Atlantic as being worthy of consideration by our own church and cathedral choirs. David Conte's anthem *Cantate Domino* is a notable exception however. His skill as a choral writer is established in the very first bar and there are many deft and felicitous touches throughout the work...Its texture and splendid use of antiphony would suggest it as particularly suitable for use in the major parish churches and cathedrals on a festive occasion.²⁴

Stephanie Henry reviewed the work for the *Choral Journal* and wrote:

Cantate Domino for double chorus is modeled upon the polychoral style of San Marco in Venice at the end of the 16th century...Conte's antiphonal setting of this popular text lasts about four and one-half minutes, utilizes two equally disposed choruses, and would make an ideal selection for combined choirs at a state or regional festival. *Cantate Domino* is an extremely well-written work suitable for both liturgical and concert use.²⁵

Alleluia for two part women's or men's voices and piano was also written in 1975 but was revised in 1992. *Hosanna* for a *cappella* SATB choir followed in 1979, with a version for SSAA choir published in 1991. The *Requiem Triptych* (1982) was Conte's next sacred work and appears in two editions, one for orchestra and TTBB choir, and one

²⁴ Conte, e-mail, 8 January 2003.

²⁵ Ibid.

for piano and TTBB choir. *Three Sacred Pieces* (1982) was written first for the Cornell University Glee Club and scored for TTBB choir and piano four-hands. A second edition was written in 1984 for the Cornell University Chorale under Thomas Sokol. This later edition was set for SATB choir and piano four-hands. Each of the three pieces in this work was dedicated to teachers who helped mold Conte in his musical studies at Cornell University. The first piece, "Thou, O Lord," was dedicated to Conte's choral conductor and teacher Thomas Sokol and was based on a text adapted from Psalm 95:4-5, and Psalm 102:25-27. "O God, Thou Hast Been our Refuge" is the second work in the set and is dedicated to Conte's composition instructor Karel Husa. The text for this work is Psalm 90:1, 2, 4, 9, 12. "Canticle" is the third piece in the triptych and is dedicated to musicologist William W. Austin. The text is from Malachi 1:11 and Psalm 150. Since its commissioning by the Cornell University Glee Club, the TTBB choral edition of "Canticle" has been programmed at two national ACDA conventions, first in San Antonio, Texas in 1987 and then in Louisville, Kentucky in 1989. Jerry Blackstone wrote the following about the work for the *Choral Journal*:

David Conte's *Canticle* is an exciting work, filled with both dramatic and sensitive sections... The writing is forceful and commanding, using a tonal, yet adventuresome harmonic vocabulary, and it conveys an effective sense of rhythmic vitality and climax... This five-minute piece is a superbly crafted and highly effective work that should be sought out by conductors...²⁶

²⁶ Ibid.

In 1988 Conte published *Set Me as a Seal* for SATB and organ. This was followed the next year by two works, his *a cappella* setting of *Silent Night* for SATB choir, with soprano and tenor soloists, and also *Valediction* for SATB chorus and keyboard. It is interesting to note the accompaniment designation of “keyboard” in the latter work. When asked, Conte replied that such a designation means the accompaniment is not that of an idiomatic organ part, but rather is simpler without a real call for pedal work. Though Conte prefers *Valediction* on organ, he believes it does work on piano and uses the term keyboard to give the performing organization the choice. It is important to note that when Conte specifies organ accompaniment he believes that for the piece to truly succeed it needs to be performed with organ.

In 1991 the San Francisco-based vocal ensemble Chanticleer commissioned *Ave Maria*. This SATB *a cappella* work has since been programmed numerous times by the group and appears on their CD, *With a Poet's Eye* (Chanticleer Records CR-8804). The *Ave Maria* has also been recorded on the CD entitled *I Sing of a Maiden: A Mosaic of Motets to the Virgin Mary* by Leo Nestor of the American Repertory Singers on the Gothic Records label # 4911. Richard Bloesch wrote for the *Choral Journal* that “In David Conte’s setting of *Ave Maria* ... high art is achieved by deceptively simple

means...maintains the high standards his previous choral works have demonstrated.”²⁷

Psalm 121 followed after in 1991, and *Prayer of St. Theresa* four years later in 1995.

Both of these works are for SATB with the specific accompaniment designation of organ.

The Great Spirit of Love was commissioned for the Fifth Quadrennial Festival of the Gay

and Lesbian Association of Choruses in 1996. This work was done in collaboration with

Tony Jones, and is viewed by Conte as an arrangement of combined ideas. Consequently

he does not find it truly representative of his own compositional voice. In 1999 Conte

wrote *A Stable-lamp is Lighted* based on his earlier solo work of the same name. This

piece appears in editions for SATB, SSAA, and TTBB. The accompaniment is unique in

Conte's output in that he specifies piano or organ. In the score he delineates notes that

should only be played if the work is performed on an organ with a pedalboard and

specific articulations for the organ versus the piano. This allows for successful

performances on either instrument with the given modifications. *O Magnum Mysterium*

(2000), Conte's latest sacred choral work, is an SATB *a cappella* composition

commissioned by the San Francisco Choral Artists under the direction of Magen

Solomon.

²⁷ Ibid.

Secular Non-SATB Choral Works with Non-orchestral Complement

Conte has two additional secular works that do not fit within the scope of this document. These pieces are *Good-bye My Fancy!* and *Carmina Juventutis*. *Good-bye My Fancy!* is a work for TTBB chorus and soprano saxophone using a text by Walt Whitman. Whitman is a poet for whom Conte has the highest regard, however, like Vaughan Williams in the *Sea Symphony*, Conte did not set the poem in its entirety.²⁸ The work was commissioned in 1992 by the Big Apple Performing Arts and was premiered in New York City's Carnegie Hall by the New York Gay Men's Chorus. It has since been taken to Sweden to be recorded by the premier's saxophonist Anders Paulsson and the University of Stockholm's Men's chorus. Bill Zakariasen of the *New York Daily News* wrote, "*Good Bye My Fancy!* is an opulently voiced, very communicative work... Conte is a fresh and positive voice in contemporary American music."²⁹ *Carmina Juventutis* or "Songs of Youth" is also for TTBB ensemble, and uses piano four hands. This work was completed in 1993.

²⁸ Conte, telephone conversation with author, 29 May 2003.

²⁹ Conte, e-mail, 8 January 2003.

CHAPTER FOUR

SECULAR SATB CHORAL WORKS WITH NON-ORCHESTRAL
SCORE COMPLEMENT

The remainder of Conte's compositional output falls under the category of secular SATB choral works with non-orchestral score complement. This group constitutes a cross-section of his varied stylistic writing from the early minimalist pieces such as *The Waking* and "Dance" from *Invocation and Dance* to the rich harmonic writing of *Charm Me Asleep*. There are eight pieces in this group *The Waking*, *Invocation and Dance*, *In Praise of Music*, *Charm Me Asleep*, *Candles in the Wilderness*, *Elegy for Matthew*, *The Composer*, and "O Sun" from *September Sun*. Of this list, several compositions are from larger orchestral works that have since been published in editions with piano accompaniment or are *a cappella* movements of larger works and so fit within the parameters of this study.

The Waking

The earliest work in this category is *The Waking*, which was commissioned in 1985 by the Music Parents Support Organization of Lakewood High School in Lakewood, Ohio, for the retirement of the school's choir director B. Neil Davis. Since Lakewood High School was Conte's alma mater this commission had a great deal of

significance for him. The work not only served to convey his gratitude to Mr. Davis and the Lakewood Public School system but also gave Conte the chance to once again write for and work with the choir that had been such an important part of his development. In the score Conte writes:

I was attracted to the American poet Theodore Roethke's work because of its powerful evocation of his own youth in the Midwest. In his poem *The Waking* I found a gentle mysticism and an acceptance of the paradoxical nature of life which seemed a poignant message for young people.

My setting of *The Waking* is simple and direct. The circular structure of the poem's villanelle form with its repeated lines inspired me to ground Roethke's gently soaring verse and subtly varied repetition with a steady minimalist-style accompaniment.³⁰

The Waking was composed during a period in which Conte was influenced by the work of the minimalist composer Steve Reich. Conte cites two of Reich's works *Desert Music* (1984) and *Tehillim* (1981) as being the catalysts for his own period of minimalist writing. This is immediately apparent in the repetitive rhythmic and phrase structure of the accompaniment.

The Waking begins with two-bar accompaniment patterns that create a seven-beat grouping. These two-bar patterns are altered by a changing sustained bass pedal that descends from "g" to "c" and provides a sense of melodic motion to this minimalist accompaniment figure. Within this pattern the pitch "g" is emphasized, and it is soon

³⁰ David Conte, "The Waking," poetry by Theodore Roethke, *Composer's Note to the score* (Boston, MA: ECS Publishing, 1991), 1.

established as the primary opening note of the pattern. Not until the soprano entrance with the A theme at m. 16 does one get a true feel for the D minor tonality. Conte tries to use key signatures where he can, but like many twentieth century composers, he is not always consistent with their inclusion. In *The Waking* he feels the beginning is in D minor but does not write that key signature because he employs so many modal inflections that it often becomes difficult to clearly represent the key in a key signature. It is not until later in the piece that Conte feels the need to include varying key signatures. In this work, as well as many of his others, Conte often uses modulation to help delineate the poetic structure or ideas. He views frequent modulation with one key leading into another as a symbol of abundance.³¹

Within the melodic idea Conte uses syncopation by tying an eighth note to the following strong beat. One can see this at the word “slow” in the soprano line of m. 19. Conte credits this anticipation of the downbeat to his love of Barbra Streisand and Frank Sinatra’s singing. This popular influence can be seen throughout the work, and is often used to bring out words that are crucial in creating the mood and sense of flow. One can see it at m. 21 with the word “fate” (though here it is as a quarter note tied over) and again at m. 23 with the eighth note anticipation on “fear.” The opening melodic idea is

³¹ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

established by the sopranos, who then act much in the manner of a soloist, with independent rhythm and dynamics. The other voices, meanwhile, act as vocal accompaniment beneath them.

FIGURE 4.1 *THE WAKING* MM. 20-24

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'THE WAKING' from measures 20 to 24. It features five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and one piano accompaniment staff. The vocal parts are written in treble clef, and the piano part is in bass clef. The lyrics are: 'I feel my fate in what I can not fear. I'. The dynamics are marked as *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand, with some notes beamed together.

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It is not until the strong declamation of the text, “I learn by going where I have to go,” in mm. 24-30 that we have a homophonic statement from the entire choir. Conte also employs a much faster harmonic rhythm at this point to add motion and strength to the statement.

Once the first stanza of text has been completed Conte uses a compressed form of the introductory accompaniment material to round out stanza one (beginning at m. 29). Throughout the work Conte remains true to the poetic form showing clear divisions of the stanzas as well as a wonderful sense of the text accentuation. There is always a flow to the rhythm of the text, almost as if it were being stated by a Shakespearean actor. It is this attention to the prosody that causes Conte to use constantly shifting meters. The ever-changing metrical grouping allows the text to be presented in an intelligible vocal manner without being forced to fit within a preconceived metric mold. Conte also tends to employ movement to the final key word of a stanza through a build-up of rhythmic and harmonic energy.

Various vocal combinations are used throughout this piece. Whereas stanza one begins with the sopranos, stanza two has the altos and tenors paired at the pick-up to m. 41 followed by the soprano and bass in imitation. Conte gives a clear feeling of the text through his use of word painting such as mm. 47-48 when the text “my being dance” moves from the predominantly duple setting of the preceding text to that of the dancing triple meter in this phrase. An increase in the harmonic rhythm likewise coincides with the forward movement of the dance. Conte further shows the dance between the women and the men by having the men’s line ascend in contrast to the women’s leaping intervals.

FIGURE 4.2 THE WAKING MM. 45-47

The musical score for 'The Waking' (mm. 45-47) is presented in five systems. The first system (m. 45) features a vocal line with the lyrics 'know? I hear my be - ing dance, ___' and a piano accompaniment. The second system (m. 46) repeats the vocal line with 'know? I hear my be - ing dance, ___'. The third system (m. 47) continues the vocal line with 'know? my be - ing dance, ___'. The fourth system (m. 48) continues the vocal line with 'know? my be - ing dance, ___'. The fifth system (m. 49) shows the piano accompaniment for the final measure, featuring a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score is marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and accidentals.

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In the second stanza Conte shows a build-up to the cadence with the repetition of the text “from ear to ear” which ends on an E minor eleventh chord in second inversion. The repetition of the text shows the crowd becoming more and more excited and increasing their energy with each outburst. This declamation is only tempered by the rounding out of the poetic phrase at m. 56 with the basses on a statement similar to that of the opening phrase found at m. 17.

A modulation to C minor/E-flat major and a shift to three-four patterns scored for

divissi men's voices set off the beginning of stanza three (m. 63). This new minimalist pattern is presented in compact one-measure groupings that give the feeling of a faster rhythmic drive. The three-four in the accompaniment allows for two-against-three between the voices and piano such as in mm. 68-72. Conte feels that simultaneously using simple and compound meter portrays a sense of purpose.³² This purposefulness coincides with the choir's question "Which are you?" and the following emphatic statement "God bless the ground!" This kind of rhythmic writing is found throughout the work where the poetry calls for a strong declamation. Stanza three ends with a brief imitation between the men as they lyrically state the text "I shall walk softly there." Conte clearly shows the light walking nature of the words at this point by changing to syncopated eighth notes in two-four. One can almost see the speakers walking together in Conte's imitative writing. This is followed by the men's closing homophonic choral declamation at m. 77.

For the accompanimental inspiration to stanza four Conte alludes to the rural aspect of the villanelle with a brief quotation from Copland's *Appalachian Spring* beginning at m. 85. When asked about this Conte said it had not been a conscious decision on his part, but rather one that he noticed later and thought was appropriate for

³²Conte, "Psalm 121 Lecture."

the overall mood of the work. In further discussions about musical borrowing Conte was quite straightforward about the matter.

Composers borrow from one another. Poulenc has the same type of progressions... his *Gloria* is identical to Stravinsky's *Serenade in A*. *Elegy for Matthew* is more violent and angry while the *Invocation* is more solemn, but both are inspired by Brahms' *Requiem*. The *Elegy for Matthew* is also inspired by the *Sinfonia de Requiem* by Britten with these wonderful d pedals in the timpani and the piano.³³

Likewise in an earlier meeting Conte stated:

Poulenc also gives one the courage to steal.... A true artist only has to copy to become original. With Poulenc one can see the influence of Mozart, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Ravel. Yet it is completely Poulenc. Stravinsky used to say it was a rare form of kleptomania, but I think that Poulenc is actually a composer that I feel extremely close to spiritually and I'd say physically, too. He is a composer that I totally understand, and I think the way I think resembles the way he thought.³⁴

Stanza four is also set apart by a modulation to B-flat major at m. 85. Conte distinguishes this stanza from stanza three by setting it for women's voices. The brightness created by the women's voices in the major key is not altered until the text leaves the "light" of the trees of the first line and goes to the "lowly worm" of line two. Here the music takes on a darker, minor quality with Phrygian inflections of the lowered second and seventh. The mood then brightens again with the modulatory sequences of the closing line. This poetic stanza further rounds out the poem by its repetition of the A theme at m. 96. This time the

³³ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

³⁴ Conte, interview, 29 July 2002.

A theme appears in two-part imitation between the women's voices. They are soon joined by the tenors, who double the soprano line.

Stanza five, which begins at the pick-up to m. 105, is the climax of the piece.

Conte marks this *fortissimo* section to be sung "Majestically," and he now has the basses join so that all four voice parts are again involved. The opening accented unison declamation drives home the point that the piece has modulated to C-sharp major. These various elements combine to underscore the importance and power of the text "Great nature has another thing to do to you and me." The Copland theme is present in fragments throughout the accompaniment of this section acting almost as a leitmotif for nature. There is also a return of the dance element that was first heard at m. 47 with the return of six-eight at m. 112, which tells one in an imperative manner to "take the lively air." This is followed by the return of the motive found in m. 79 at the sequential cadence starting at m. 118.

The last stanza, number six (m. 123), is marked to be delivered in a much calmer manner than stanza five. There is a return of the opening ostinato accompaniment, though now is raised from the opening D minor to E major and reduced to one-measure patterns as opposed to the earlier two-bar patterns. The three-part vocal line starts with a brief imitation between the soprano and tenor separated by only two beats. These two lines are

contrasted with the tonic pedal in the alto. This three-part texture is then rounded out by a slower hushed four-part statement at m. 134.

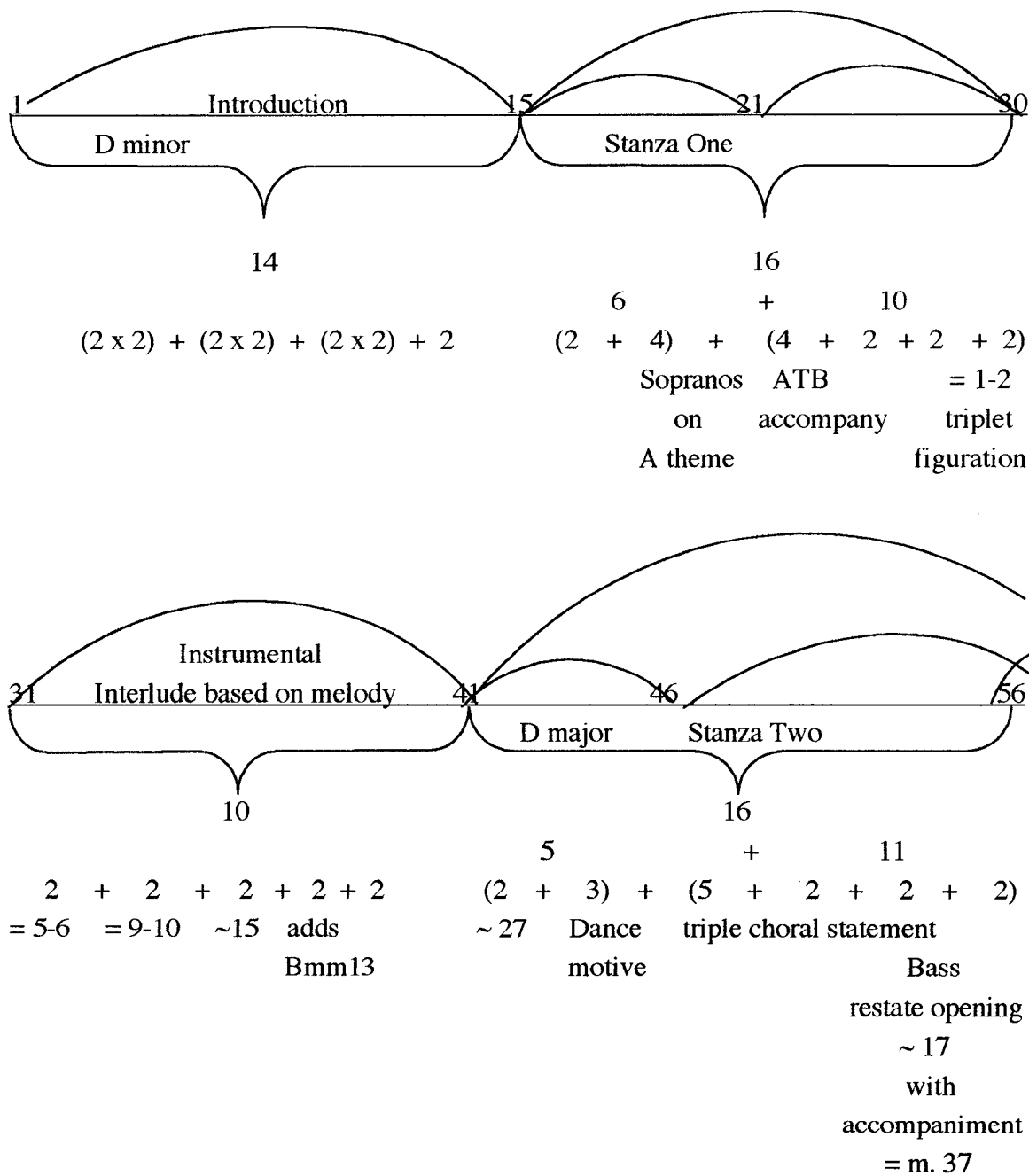
The work concludes with a recapitulation at m. 135. The accompanimental figuration is similar to that of m. 17, and the soli A theme which was originally given to the sopranos is now given to the altos at m. 138 with slight octave and intervallic adjustments. This is then followed by a duplication of the accompaniment and four-part vocal writing of mm. 20-30 with the only change being a tenor shift to “c” rather than “a” at the end to create the seventh of the D minor chord. Conte closes the composition by repeating the lines “where to go” from the opening stanza at the end of the work. This text is set quietly and *a cappella* to give a further sense of closure. Conte then concludes with a brief piano coda (m. 159) based on the opening melodic idea before resolving the entire piece, not in D minor, but on the piccardi, D major. Throughout this work Conte uses dotted quarter writing in a strong homophonic manner to punctuate crucial questions or statements in the text at certain phrase endings. This gives extra weight to the poetry by highlighting it. These events can be heard at mm. 27, 43, 50, 68-72, 79, 118, 149, and 155. Two additional examples can be found in mm. 129 and 134 where the same rhythmic figure is used but with a slowing of the tempo and a dynamic marking of *pianissimo* to emphasize the text.

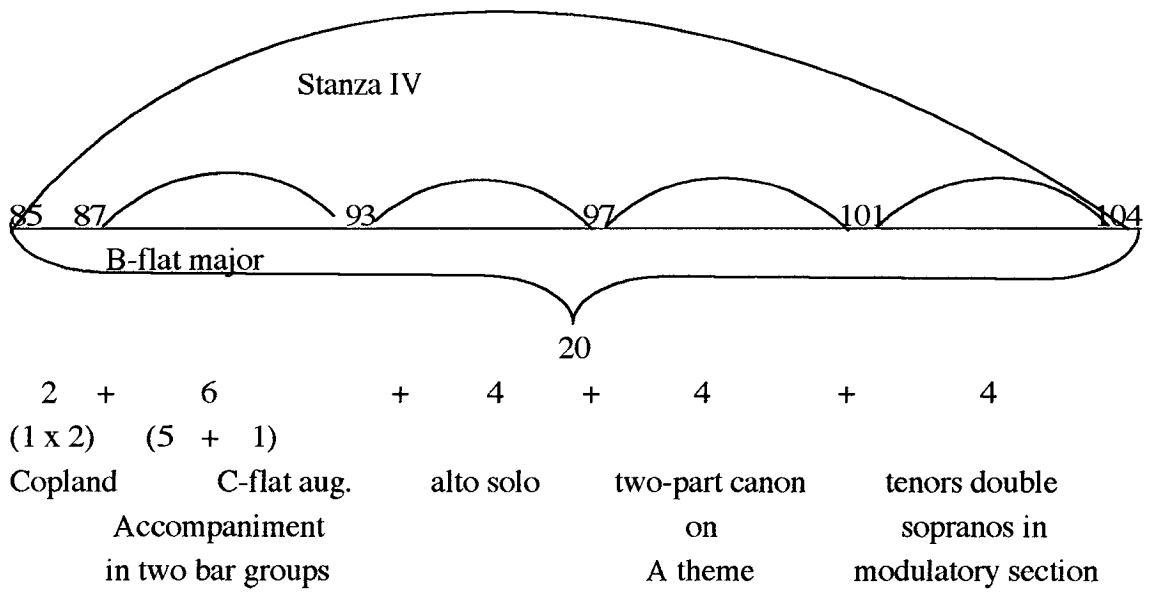
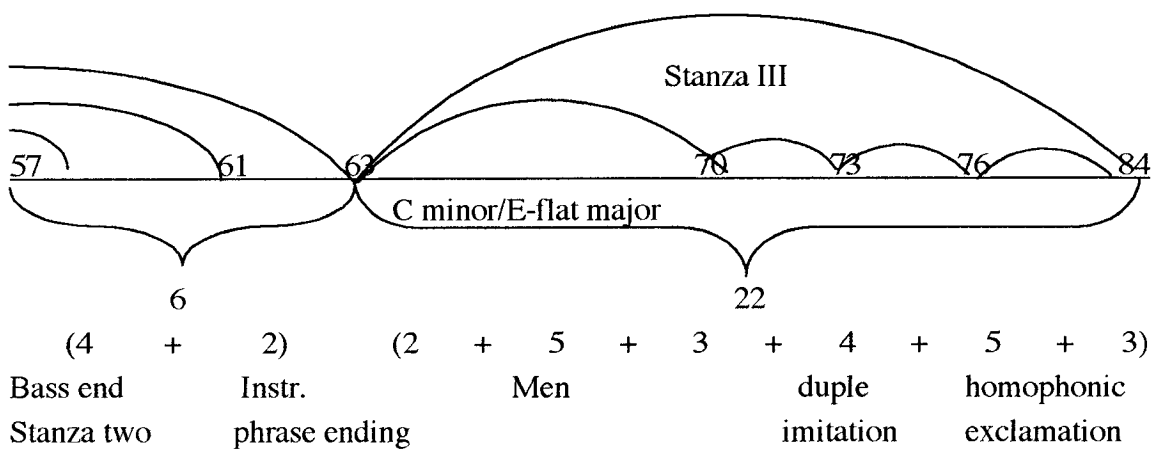
Following each of the study pieces, the reader will find a chart showing the overall structure of that work. Large musical ideas are represented by extended arches that begin and end at the corresponding measures marked on the horizontal line below them. In some instances, such as *Charm Me Asleep* (p 110), not only have the musical ideas been displayed, but also the poetic stanzas. This is because the stanzas often consist of several distinct musical sections. Within the arches denoting the large ideas, the reader will see smaller arches that are intended to represent the musical phrase structure of the composition. In *Charm Me Asleep* interrupted arcs indicate only the beginning and ending points of the phrases. This was done for clarity because of the number of overlapping phrases in this work. Most of Conte's other pieces have fewer overlapping phrases and so a continuous arch seemed appropriate.

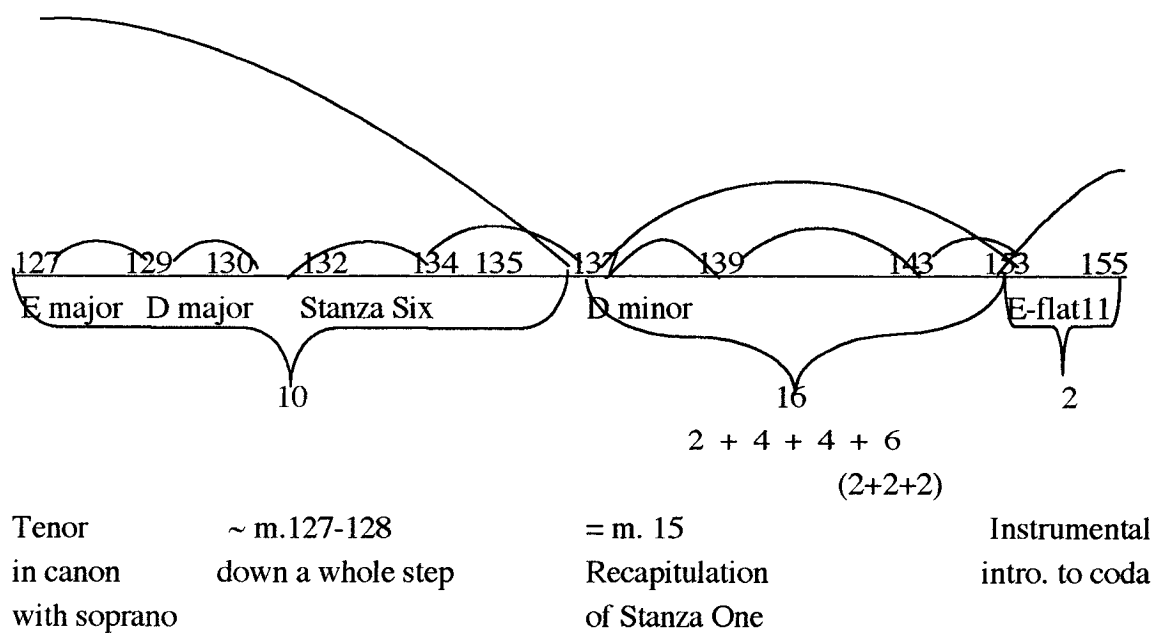
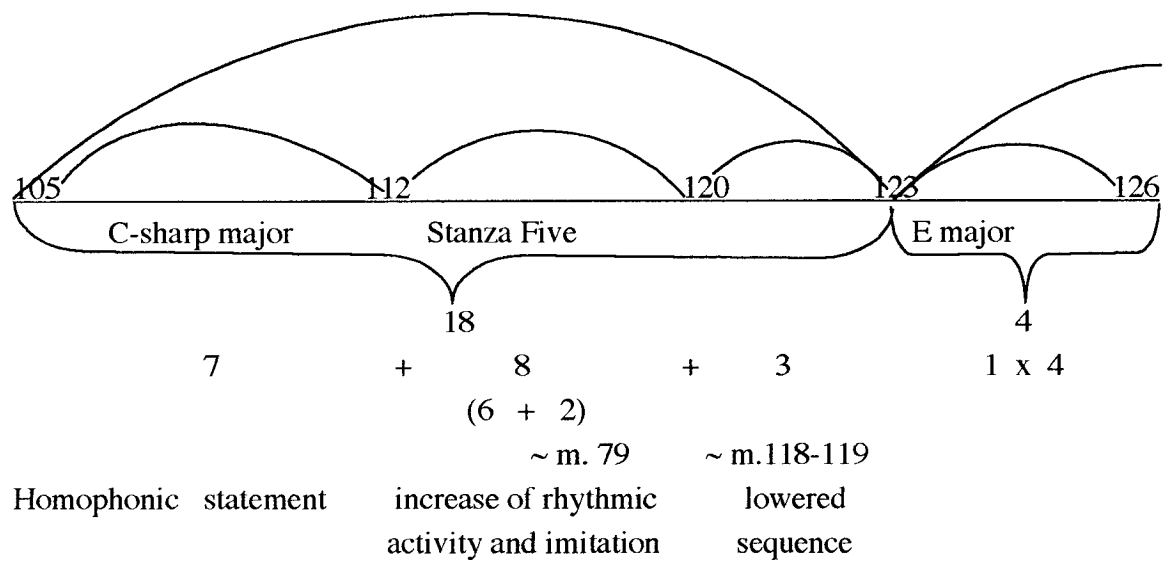
Significant key centers of the works have been included below the horizontal "measure line" and have been positioned to correspond to the measure markings above them. As an additional guide the charts have a series of numbers placed below sectional brackets. These indicate the number of measures in a phrase and are often subdivided into further smaller groupings within the large phrases. Such groupings are found in parentheses, for example (2 + 3). The symbol "=" followed by a measure number has been used when a section is the same as an earlier portion of the music. Measure numbers

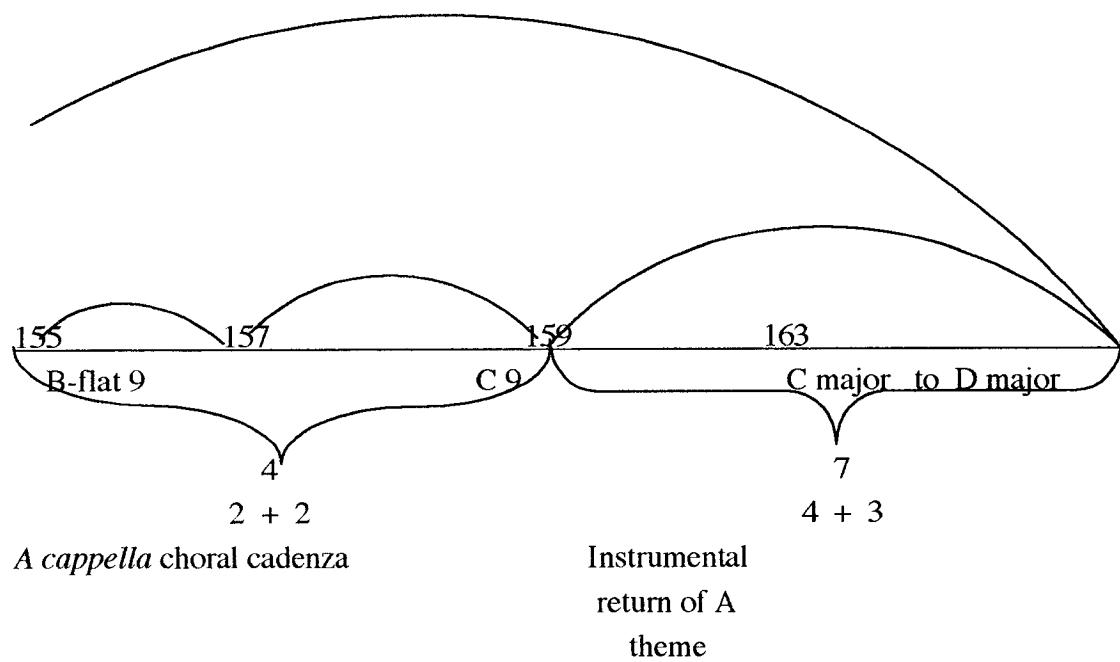
indicate the earlier music with which that section is being compared. When a part of the composition is “similar” to a preceding section, the symbol “~” followed by a measure number has been included. Again the measure number refers to the earlier musical idea that this new section resembles. The reader will also occasionally find brief textual descriptions of specific features under the corresponding measure numbers where they are found. For the sake of clarity not all elements discussed in the body of the document have been represented on the structural charts for each work.

CHART 4.1, THE WAKING









Invocation and Dance

“Invocation”

Conte's next work *Invocation and Dance* was published in 1986 and also shows the influence of Steve Reich's compositional style. In 1981 Reich's *Tehillim* (Hebrew for Psalms) was published. *Tehillim* used freer melodic ideas than are found in his earlier works since Reich tried to be faithful to the speech rhythm of the Psalms. However it was in the repetitive pulse of the percussion that Reich remained faithful to his minimalist style.³⁵ Conte drew upon this fixed pulse combined with a more fluid declamation of text for his work *Invocation and Dance*. “It has minimalist rhythms, but it goes way beyond minimalist rhythms because it has the textures and colors of minimalism but the structure and form of more traditional music. That's what I got from Reich.”³⁶ The choice of instrumentation was also inspired by a piece by Reich, *Desert Music*, which came out in 1984 and employed mallet percussion and pianos.

Invocation and Dance was commissioned by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus under the direction of Gregg Tallman and premiered on October 4, 1986. The composition was originally scored for TTBB, piano or orchestra, but was redone in 1989

³⁵ Robert Schwarz, *Steve Reich: Tehillim/Three Movements*, CD liner notes, Elektra Nonesuch 79295-2, 1994, compact disc.

³⁶ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

for SATB, piano or orchestra. It was further reworked as a Version II for either voicing with piano four hands and percussion. The SATB Version II will be examined here. Both SATB editions were done for Whitman College Choir in Walla Walla, Washington under the direction of Robert Bode. It is dedicated to Conrad Susa, another San Francisco composer, in gratitude for the advice he gave Conte during the orchestration of the work. The text for *Invocation and Dance* is from Walt Whitman's "Memories of President Lincoln" and makes extensive use of the imperative mood. In his book *Varied Carols* David P. DeVenney describes the opening movement as "a rapturous *pavane*, a slow and gentle invocation for a release that only death can deliver to the sufferer."³⁷

Conte starts the work with the timpani, or in our case the piano, playing "d's" on quarter notes much in the way Brahms began his *Requiem*. When asked about the similarity of this beginning compared to that of other composers Conte replied:

It doesn't concern me in the least. Tchaikovsky does that, Beethoven does it. Brahms did it in a way that's maybe more distinctive so we think of that first. But for me to find the mood I want.... See I don't worry about originality. Boulanger taught me, she said, 'The most important advice for a composer is make a list of the music you love, learn it by heart, and when composing never seek to avoid the obvious.' It was very profound what she was saying, 'If you love music and are drawn to it take time to really know and learn it so that it is part of you.' Vaughan Williams used to say, 'It doesn't matter if what you are saying has already been said, but whether or not it's the right thing to be said at that moment.'"³⁸

³⁷ David DeVenney, *Varied Carols: A Survey of American Choral Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 275.

³⁸ Conte, Interview, July 29, 2002.

It is this quarter note “d” that sets the mood for the first movement of this elegy. There are only short sections of the movement without the repeated quarter note “d” or a figure that resembles it moving as a foundation under the other parts. The initial melodic statement is introduced in the accompaniment at m. 3, and then stated by the choir at m. 10 in unison before fanning out to a B-flat seventh chord. Throughout this opening choral statement of the text Conte designs everything to bring focus to the word “death.” Within the vocal phrase, the tenor I illustrates the “soothing” word with a descending line at m. 14 that creates and releases dissonant tension. There is an increase in dynamics, which moves the voices forward to the tenuto on the word “death.” The basses (m. 17-19) also provide a sense of motion to the key word, “death” by singing an ascending scale starting on “g” and ending on “d.” The density of the texture is further increased in mm. 14-17 by the addition of piano I playing a statement similar to the choir parts of mm. 11-15. The treble piano part at m. 19 then sets up the increase in rhythmic activity that characterizes the next section. A new idea of circling triplet figures portrays the word “undulate” beginning at m. 20. In a manner similar to that found in the first section, Conte has this idea grow in intensity by adding new layers of instruments and voices starting in the lower registers and moving upwards. Conte is also able to convey the impression of undulation by having the voices *crescendo* and *decrescendo* at different

times than the instruments and by an echoing back and forth between the women and the men. This gives the section a sense of constant energy and flow which perfectly illustrates the text. Conte then manages to portray contrast in the following text beginning at m. 28 by reducing the rhythmic energy of all parts briefly in order to allow the presentation of the legato nature of the “serenely” text. There is a strong cadence on a G major ninth chord at m. 28 in contrast to the previous minor tonality. This shift to a major tonality further illustrates the word “serenely.” The harmony then illuminates the word “arriving” with a return to D minor. Conte underscores “arriving” by arriving at the D minor seventh chord at m. 32. The section then ends with a rhythmic flourish in the piano I at m. 37, which brings the piece into an instrumental interlude. This interlude contrasts the steady pulsing of the beginning with a more lyrical idea. Conte also varies the pulsing idea by creating syncopation against it and moving the pulsation from piano II to piano I at m. 39. It is very characteristic of Conte’s writing to avoid exact repetition of material. There is almost always some type of change employed. Such a change can be seen at m. 42 when the lyrical idea moves to the piano I and the pulsing motive is transferred to the piano II, and a shift to F major. However, here the pulsing is changed to a more harp-like style of arpeggiated chords, which could be an allusion to heaven after death. In m. 49 there is an expressive cross-relation with a simultaneous “f-sharp” and

“f-natural” in a D minor tonality that moves the piece into the next section.

A sustained C major subtonic harmony above a new rhythmic idea starts the next section at m. 50. This rhythmic motive of a triplet figure beginning with a rest foreshadows the vocal line “in the day” which enters at m. 52. Conte has a bright setting of this text on the dominant in the sopranos and tenors, but then contrasts it with a darker “in the night” in the altos and basses.

FIGURE 4.3, “INVOCATION” MM. 52-55

Poco più mosso (Con moto, $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 64$)

The musical score consists of four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal lines are in D minor and feature a triplet figure starting with a rest. The piano accompaniment includes a sustained C major subtonic harmony. The score is marked "Poco più mosso (Con moto, ♩ = ca. 64)".

52 *pp* *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp cant.* *Vib.*

In the day, in the day, in the day, in the day, in the day,

in the night, in the night, in the night, in the night, in the night,

In the day, in the day, in the day, in the day, in the day,

in the night, in the night, in the night, in the night, in the night,

Poco più mosso (Con moto, $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 64$)

pp *p* *mp cant.* *pp* *p legato* *arp. sim.*

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This illustration of the text is emphasized to an even greater extent by having the dark alto and bass line set using phrygian inflections of the lowered second. It is this lowered second that allows the piece to modulate quickly into E-flat major at m. 54 for the restatement of the text “in the day.” This restatement is given a new burst of energy by an increase in tempo. After a brief rhythmic flurry at m. 55, which introduces the use of the percussion for the first time, there is an abrupt change to E-flat minor to again contrast night from day. Two more variations on the lyric rhythmic flourish follow and are succeeded by a gentle *a cappella* phrase about “delicate” death at m. 62. Conte gives “delicate” a light, delicate nature not only by setting the voices *a cappella*, but also through his choice of triplet notation for “delicate” from mm. 63-67. This section then concludes with a modulation to C major at m. 68. At this point Conte combines the harp-like pulsing idea with the more lyrical undulating triplets in full instrumental complement while the altos and basses sing out like church bells tolling on the dominant “g” in octaves.

Measure 76 marks the beginning of a recapitulation with a deceptive cadence on D minor. The recapitulation begins with a return to the original tempo and a use of material similar to that of m. 10. Conte varies this restatement by introducing a “c-sharp” to “d” figure that momentarily increases the level of dissonance. This accompanimental

motive grows into a descending sequence that flows under the text “lovely soothing death” from mm. 79-84. The vocal part is expanded for the first time to six-part writing with a *divissi* in the alto and bass. This *divissi* writing allows for a dissonance in the alto and bass that can then be released at m. 81 to portray “soothing.” The men double the women at this point, so although there is a denser chord structure, it is really three-part writing. This is followed by the undulation section, which is vocally fairly similar to the opening, but includes a variant of the triplet accompaniment (a two-against-three figuration with ascending sequences in the right hand) beginning at m. 90.

FIGURE 4.4, "INVOCATION" MM. 90-91

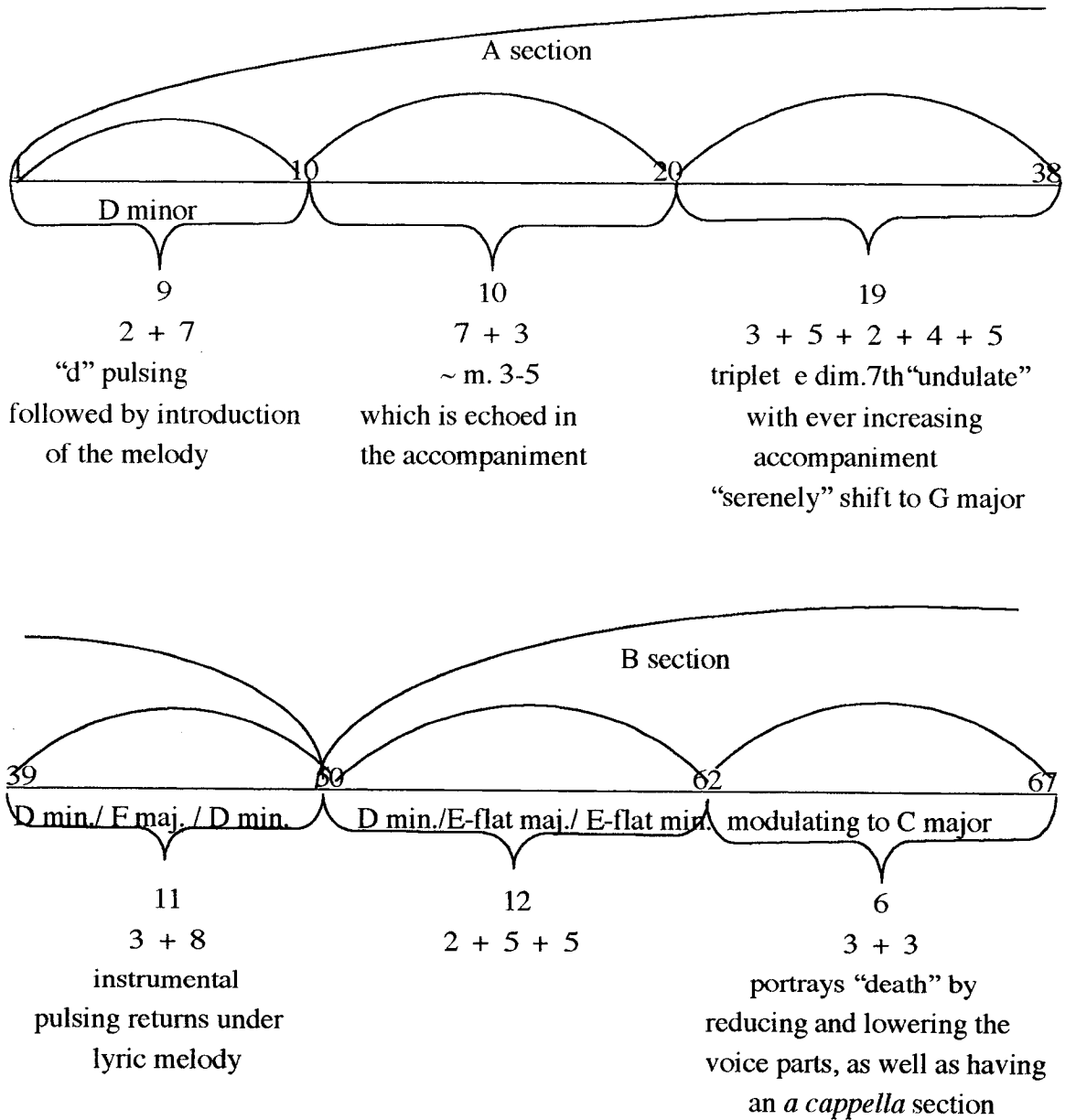
The musical score for "Invocation" (mm. 90-91) is presented in a multi-staff format. It includes four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment consisting of two grand staff systems (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is marked with dynamics such as *poco a poco cresc.*, *mp*, *mf*, and *div.*. The lyrics are: "the world, round the world, world, the world, round the world, world, un - du - late round the world, round the world, the world, un - du - late round the world, round the world, the". The piano accompaniment features a prominent triplet pattern in both hands, which is imitated by the vocal lines.

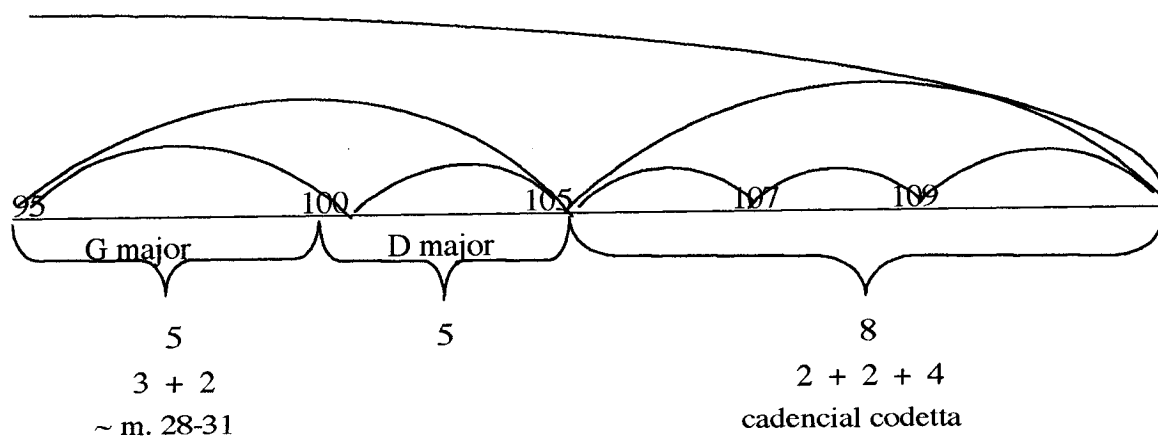
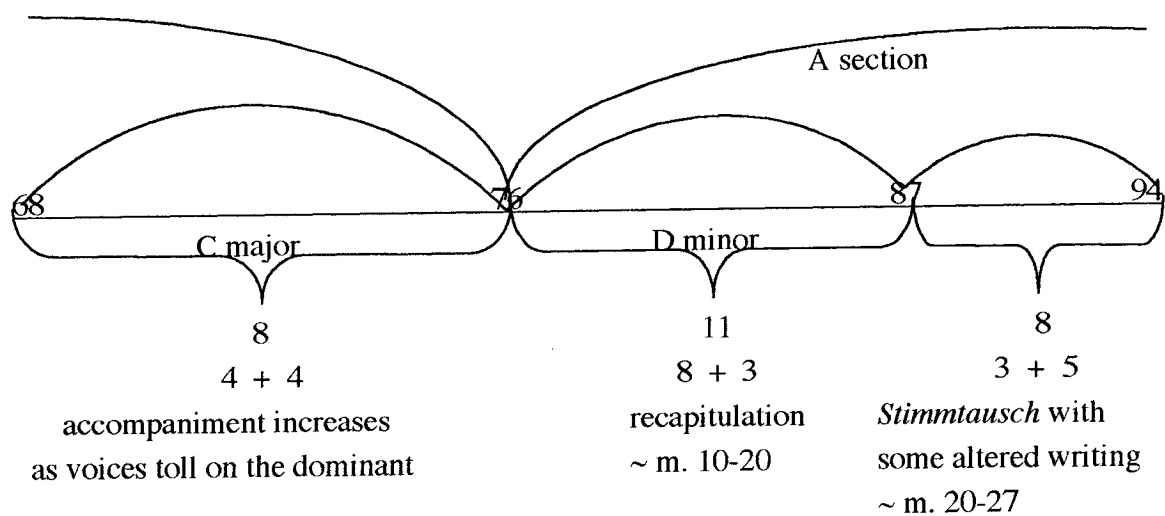
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Conte includes one more example of word painting in this section with the last statement of "round the world." "Round" descends through a quick series of back and forth intervals at m. 92, which are then imitated and extended in the accompaniment. A G major "serenely" section similar to mm. 28-29 follows at m. 95. This time, however, the "serenely" section is succeeded by a D major chord for "arrival" at m. 99 in contrast

to the earlier which used D minor. It is this chord that brings about the final modulation to end the movement in D major. There is a brief cadencial codetta, which is marked “slightly slower,” beginning at m. 105 with repetitions of the text “ O come.” Conte often ends works with similar cadencial text repetitions. Here it is over a rhythmic two-bar descending melody. This melody in the accompaniment then breaks down into ever- decreasing melodic fragments in the last four measures of the movement until the work ends with a *niente* marking bringing it to an extreme *pianissimo* close. The overall form of this movement is ABA with the B section dividing the A sections from m. 50-76.

CHART 4.2, "Invocation"
 from
 Invocation and Dance





“Dance”

It is in “Dance” that one truly senses the contribution of Steve Reich. This is a piece that is full of rhythmic energy created by repetitive driving accompanimental patterns. There is a very active double mallet and piano scoring which harkens directly to the scoring of Reich’s *Desert Music* with its prominent role of percussion and pianos over the rest of the orchestra. “Dance” is written in a style clearly contrasting with that of “Invocation.” Where “Invocation” is marked “slow” and “solemnly” with the quarter note equaling a tempo marking of about fifty-two, “Dance” calls for jazzy exuberance and moves along at quarter note equaling one hundred forty-four. There is a much greater demand placed on the mallet instruments in this movement, as well as very percussive writing for the piano parts. This movement is in a single steady tempo throughout with a great use of mixed meter. David DeVenney describes this movement as “a bright, almost effervescent homage to life, a reminder that even in the middle of an ever-present death, those left living can remain hopeful.”³⁹

³⁹ DeVenney, 275.

“Dance” begins in E major with the xylophone introducing the one-measure A theme four times. Conte notates the metric groupings within this five-four theme in a three-plus-two pattern. Throughout the work most of these five-beat groups will be grouped with Conte’s indications.

FIGURE 4.5, “DANCE” MM. 1-7

With jazzy exuberance ($\text{♩} = 144$)
(3 + 2) (4 x)

A THEME

Xylo. (hard sticks)
f (4 x)

With jazzy exuberance ($\text{♩} = 144$)
(3 + 2) *f* (4 x)
(bring out the left hand)

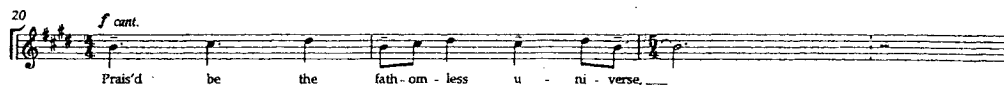
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For the next section of the introductory material (beginning at m. 5) Conte takes the A theme and develops it through a series of variations that are clearly delineated by the

use of new metric groupings. These variations build in intensity until the *subito piano* at m. 12 and the process of dynamic and rhythmic building begins again. The introduction reaches a climax with a return to the opening four-bar figure at m.17, but as is Conte's penchant, there is a variation in the statement of the A theme. In m. 17 Conte adds the glockenspiel to double the xylophone and gives the piano II an additional echo figure. The writing for this introductory section sets the overall tone of high energy for the entire movement.

The sopranos and tenors enter in octaves at m. 21 on the B theme.

FIGURE 4.6, "DANCE" – B THEME



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This theme, in four-four, is still highly percussive in nature with strong syncopation. Conte allows the theme to be introduced in a clear manner by having the mallet players drop out of the texture leaving only the piano II part as accompaniment. The accompaniment part is similar to that of m. 1 except for interjections by the piano I beginning at m. 23. These interjections are based on material from m. 17. The next thematic change is heralded by the return of the xylophone on the A theme at m. 26.

A new idea begins at m. 28 where the entire choir makes a strong C theme declamation
 “for life, and for joy, and for objects and knowledge curious.”

FIGURE 4.7, “DANCE” – C THEME



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At m. 32 a ritornello of the first four measures begins a recapitulation of the music up to this point. Conte sets the restatement of the B theme in a two-part harmonized version in octaves for all four voice parts in m. 36. He then revoices the return of the C theme (m. 42) and adds a concluding double statement of the text “and for love, sweet love” (pick-up to m. 45). This statement is presented first by the sopranos and tenors, and is then moved down the octave and set for all four parts. Conte now writes a full ensemble ending for this section beginning with the pick-up to m. 50. This one-measure antecedent D theme is repeated and extended before the consequent phrase begins at m. 54.

FIGURE 4.8, "DANCE" – D THEME



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The concluding phrase has the men in a brief canon with the women as they descend by sequences. Through this canon Conte is able to create the musical image of the poetic phrase “enwinding arms” with the rhythmic interweaving of the voice parts. A highly accented closing figure in the pianos (mm. 56-57) brings the section to a close.

The large B section of this movement begins at m. 58 with another five-four meter. This section will develop various thematic ideas until the A section returns at m. 162 making an overall ABA form similar to the form of the first movement.

Xylophone and piano II begin the highly energized B section and then settle down to a quieter syncopated accompaniment. Here the accompaniment has a continuously shifting accentuation based on eighth note groupings of twos and threes. For clarity’s sake, Dr. Chamberlain of the University of Arizona⁴⁰ highly suggests conducting these opening three bars in a four pattern which allows the accents to fall on a downbeat. Measure 58 works as a grouping of (3+2)+(2+3), m. 59 as (2+3)+(2+3), and m. 60 as (3+2)+(2+3).

⁴⁰ Bruce Chamberlain, Choral conducting lesson at the University of Arizona, 14 March 2003.

This makes a smoother transition into the E theme which is presented by the men, starting with the basses, at m. 61.

FIGURE 4.9, "DANCE" – E THEME



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The light, lyrical nature of this theme presents a total contrast to those that have come previously. Tenors and basses then answer the preceding bass line with a modulation to C major at m. 64. This five-bar phrase at m. 64 rhythmically resembles the D theme (m. 50). However, throughout this lyrical portion there is still a sense of the earlier percussiveness. This connection is made possible by the pulsing undercurrent that accompanies the legato vocal lines. The women then introduce a lyrical "chant-like" F theme halfway through m. 68.

FIGURE 4.10, "DANCE" – F THEME



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Here the accompaniment shifts to an echoing lyrical idea to compliment the women's

voices. The men then join the women at m. 72 in a variation of the women's F theme, which brings us briefly to E-flat major. As is often the case, Conte concludes this section with an increase of rhythmic and harmonic activity as he moves to the cadence. Conte has given careful attention to the setting of the text, using shifting meters to allow for the word stress.

The next large section begins at m. 77 with a shift to F-sharp major. A new idea with its ascending figuration in the piano II is combined with a return of the A theme in the vibraphone and piano I. In this section the men introduce the G theme, a rich four-part idea at m. 84 that joyously greets death.

FIGURE 4.11, "DANCE" – G THEME

The musical score for "DANCE" - G THEME consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system shows the vocal line with lyrics "Ap - proach strong de -" and the piano accompaniment with dynamics *dim.* and *mp richly*. The second system shows the vocal line with lyrics "liv' - ess, when it is so, When thou hast" and the piano accompaniment with dynamics *mp*. The third system shows the vocal line with lyrics "tak - en them I joy - ous - ly sing the dead," and the piano accompaniment with dynamics *cresc.* and *mf*.

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The accompaniment becomes much more fluid shifting to the piano I, which is marked to be played “harp-like.” It is written in one-measure arching phrases that then grow in length with the men’s melody woven into them at m. 87. Conte uses modal inflections beginning in m. 93 to set up a brief A major center. An imitative section begins at m. 97 as Conte creates the poetic idea of waves washing over the listener. This is achieved by imitation between the vocal parts as each new voice floats to importance as it enters. Conte completes this phrase at m.102 with a III chord. “Cadencing on iii (or III) instead of V happens a lot in my music, as well as in Barber’s... It’s more sensitive.”⁴¹ Conte concludes this section of “Dance” with a rhythmically active instrumental bridge at m. 108 which returns the piece to the key of F-sharp major.

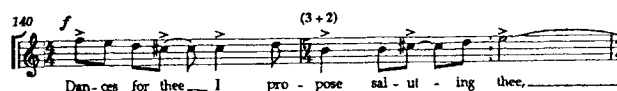
Starting at m. 111, Conte revoices mm. 84-108 for four parts with light accompaniment. As in earlier sections of the work, there are melodic fragments echoing throughout the accompaniment as the piece builds to the next cadencial point and new section.

Once again a new section begins (m. 135) with a return of the five-four A theme. Here, however, a strong cross-relationship between “f-natural” and “f-sharp” in the accompaniment emphasizes the sting of “death.” This transitional section in A major is

⁴¹ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

made up of short melodic outcries by the choir with the A theme interspersed throughout and a shift to A major. A dance-like H theme sung by the women, responds to these outcries at m. 142.

FIGURE 4.12, "DANCE" – H THEME



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Conte uses syncopated rhythms to show the “dance” of this text. The dance-like idea is then answered at m. 144 by material reminiscent of mm. 68 –71 and a modulation to F major.

At the pick-up to m. 148 the music takes on a softer, though still energized, forward feel with the introduction of the I theme.

FIGURE 4.13, "DANCE" – I THEME



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Syncopated accents help propel the music forward. Beginning at m. 148 there is a shifting sense of the downbeat in the piano II due to the placement of the eighth rest in the

two-note groupings. At m. 152 this phrase takes on the rhythmic and melodic shape of the material from mm. 27-29 with similar texts and descending two-note motives. As this text is repeated, the music modulates from a brief D major center to the opening key of E major. Throughout this portion of the piece, the vibraphone has ascending scale crescendos that draw the listener's attention to phrase climaxes. The final scale ascent brings the piece to its closing material in m. 162.

A semi-chorus starts the closing A section of this ABA piece at m. 162 with a well-accented *subito piano* ostinato in the altos and tenors. Another ostinato layer is added by the basses using the B theme, which is doubled by the piano II (m. 163). The piano I adds an additional ostinato idea to these layers in the same measure.

FIGURE 4.14, "DANCE" MM. 161-164

161 *unis.* SEMI - CHORUS

night, *sub. p* jazzy, with a slight sting on each accent

night, Dance or, sing prais -

night, Dance or, sing prais -

night, Prais'd be the fath - er - less u - ni - verse.

Xylo. *mf*

Glock. *mf*

sub. p jazzy, with a slight sting on each accent

sub. p jazzy, with a slight sting on each accent

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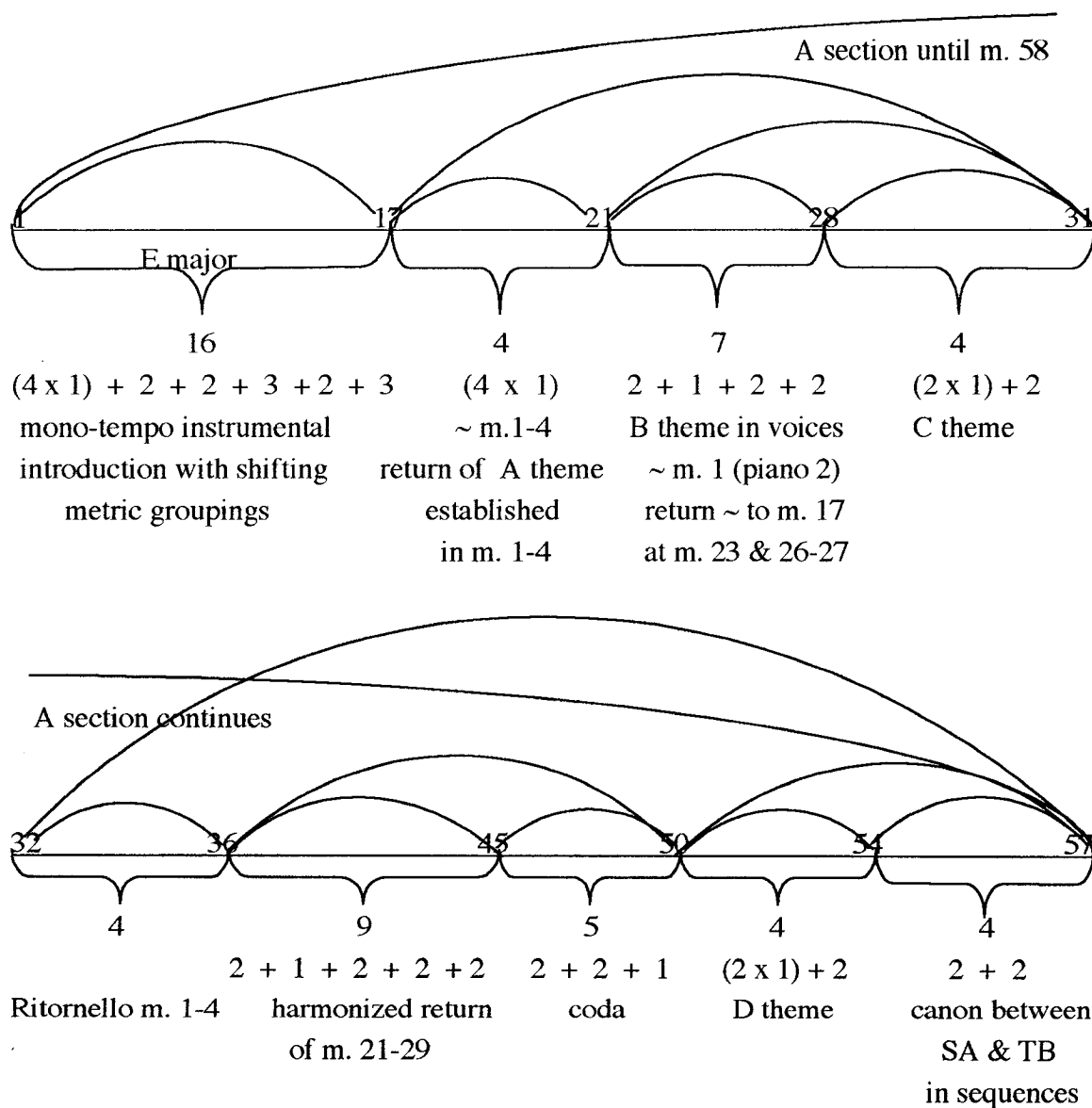
Finally the sopranos join these interwoven ostinato figures at m. 171 doubling the basses' B theme. The full choir then is added to this ever-growing idea with their *forte* C-sharp major entrance at m. 178. Conte is very successful in creating the idea of the dance mentioned in the title as the work builds to a frenetic level with sudden dynamic contrasts

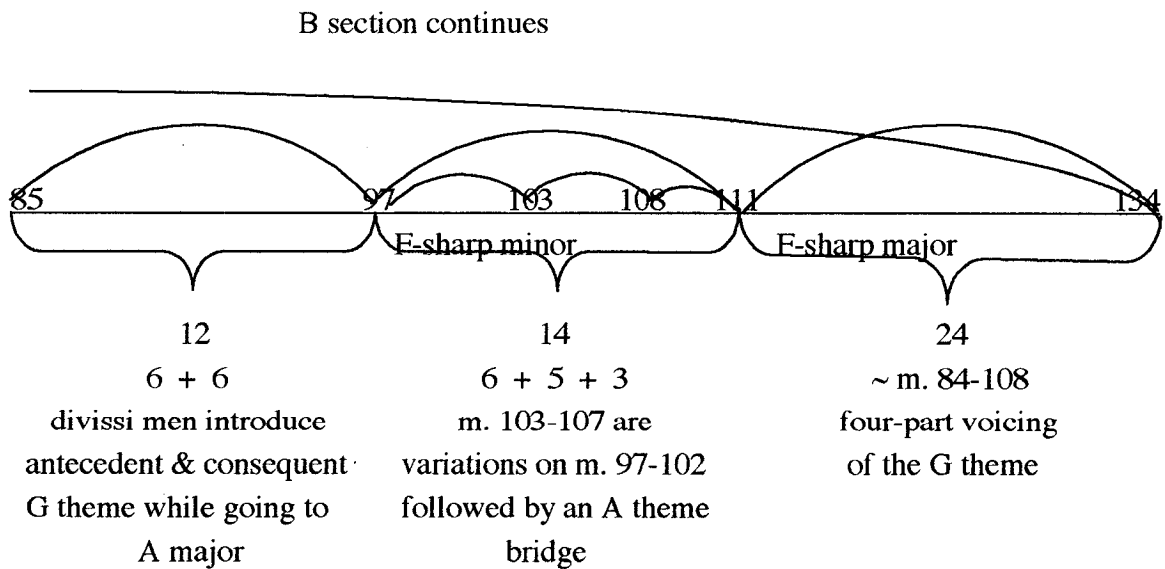
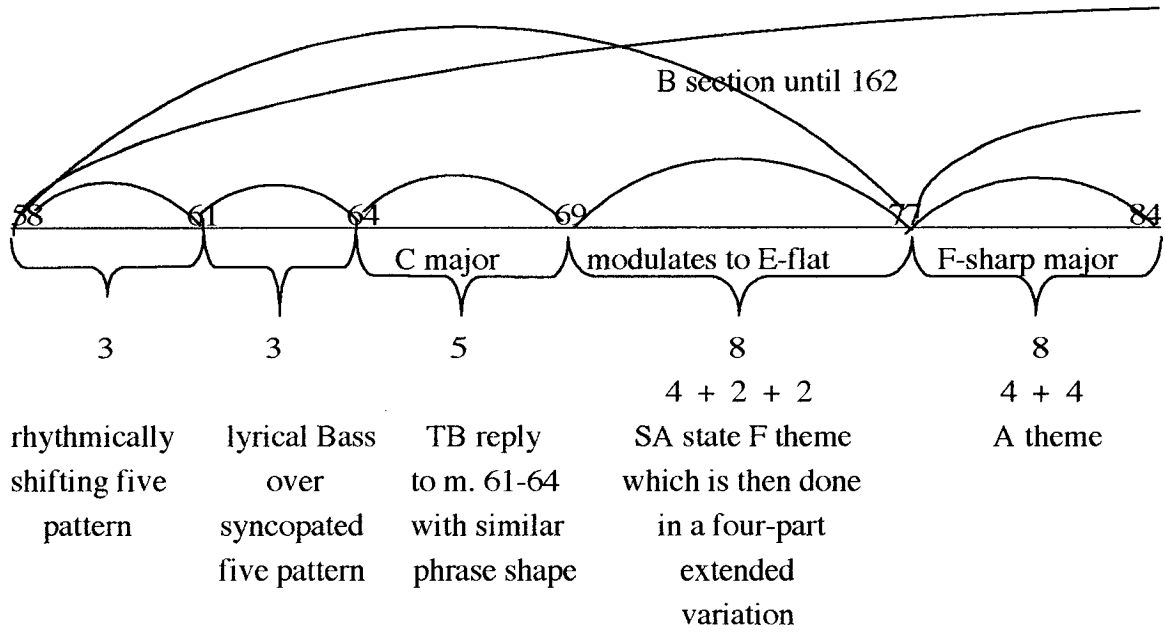
and echoes back and forth between the women and men. The mallet players finally join with ostinato patterns of their own at m. 187 to add to the intensity of the piece, and the full ensemble then repeats the basic idea of m. 186 several more times before coming to a full choir exclamation of the B theme at m. 199. This is doubled by both of the pianos, but without the mallet players. The entire ensemble then has four stinging chordal exclamations on the text “life, joy, love, sing praise.” A highly rhythmic and accented eight-bar cadenza based on the A theme is given to the instruments in m. 206. This culminates in a rhythmic and dynamic build-up to the full ensemble *fortissimo* E major chord for the word “life.” Conte has the male and female vocal parts doubling one another from m. 199 to the end except for the word “praise.” To color this word he uses an A major ninth chord which is sustained for four bars.

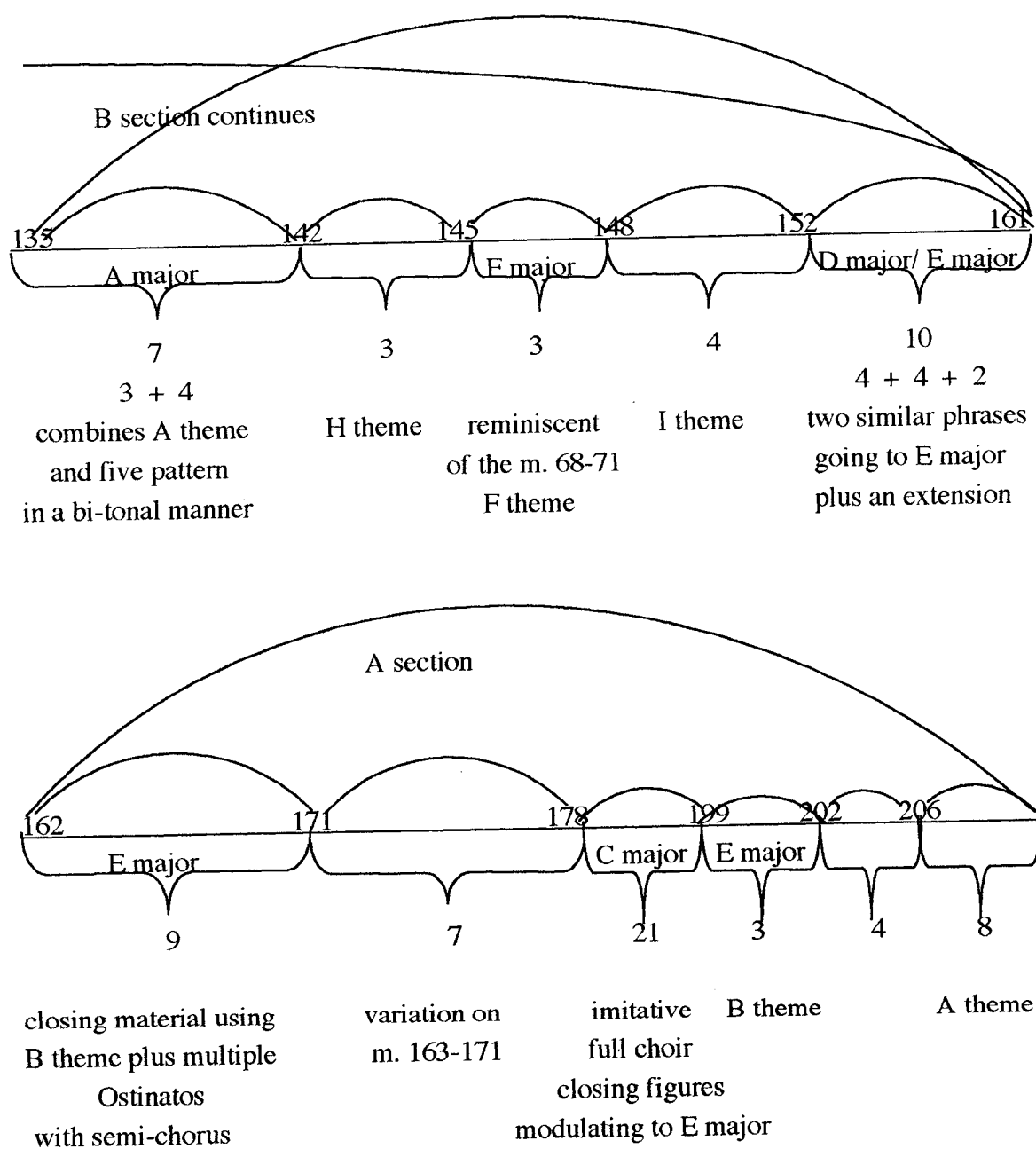
Throughout this composition, as with many of his others, Conte uses modulations to delineate divisions between poetic ideas or stanzas. Many of these modulations are to keys that are related by third using the common tones that allow for the harmonic shifts to occur smoothly. Conte brings musical weight to the poetic focal point of the piece, “death” by sustaining the word (generally on the downbeat) on chords of extended harmony (m. 108 and 135). Although it also occurs at m. 56, this first statement of the word “death” has the women entering on the final beat of the preceding measure and the

men joining them on the downbeat. The poetry of *Invocation and Dance* makes great use of the imperative mood, which further adds to the sense of power and forward motion.

CHART 4.3, "Dance"
from
Invocation and Dance







In Praise of Music

In Praise of Music was commissioned initially in 1991 by the Peninsula Women's Chorus under the direction of Patricia Hennings in Palo Alto, California. They recorded the work on their CD *Treasures*. This early version is for SSAA choir and consists of three sections. The sections are based on an unfinished fragment of poetry by Percy Bysshe Shelley and on John Dryden's *Ode to St. Cecilia's Day*. A revision of the work took place in 1994 when the Clay Fund of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles commissioned an SATB version for the University Choir. The new work was premiered May 7, 1994 under the direction of Mary Breden. In this newer version Conte adds two sections based on the poetry of Thomas Carew. These two additional sections, one at the beginning and one at the end of the work, use the same text but are in contrasting styles.

In the composer's notes for this work Conte describes the piece as follows:

The work is cast in five contrasting sections performed without pause. The first section, based on Carew's poem, opens with the siren's song in undulating chords alternating between the orchestra and the women's voices. The men's voices enter and invite the listeners to "hear this siren sing." The music builds to its first climax as fanfares in the brass introduce the second section based on Shelley's poem, marked *Allegro e appassionato*. The ecstatic nature of music is expressed in an unabashedly romantic vein through vigorous choral writing and a turbulent accompaniment. This gives way to the third section based on Dryden's poem, marked *Lento misterioso*. The chorus sings a lyrical melody in canon, filled with awe in listening to Jubal's lyre, represented here by the harp. The fourth section, marked *Rapturously floating*, returns to Shelley's poem. Supported by a flowing accompaniment, the tenors and basses sing long, sustained lines, embellished by murmuring in the *divisi* sopranos and altos. This section ends blissfully and calmly; the singers have floated to heaven, enraptured by the transfiguring power of music. In the final section, the

singers are greeted in heaven by the *a cappella* chorus singing the cantata's opening lines, reaffirming that "love can enter at the ear."⁴²

Conte has since rescored this work for the edition that will be discussed here, for mixed choir and piano.

The piece opens with a text by Thomas Carew in E-flat major accompanied by a gentle chordal rocking that is then imitated by textless women's siren-like voices.

FIGURE 4.15, IN PRAISE OF MUSIC MM. 1-7

The musical score for 'In Praise of Music' (mm. 1-7) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 1-4) shows the Soprano/Alto line and the Piano accompaniment. The Soprano/Alto line has a rest for the first three measures, then enters with a melodic phrase marked 'p' and 'A'. The Piano accompaniment features a chordal texture with dynamics of *mf*, *pp sempre*, and *p dolce, espress.*. The second system (mm. 5-7) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The Soprano/Alto line has a '5' above the first measure and 'ooh' below the second measure. The Piano accompaniment continues with a similar chordal texture.

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⁴² David Conte, *In Praise of Music*, text by Thomas Carew, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Dryden, Composer's Note to the score (Boston, MA: ECS Publishing, 1997), 1.

Conte describes this harmonic undulation as being influenced by the writing of Debussy,⁴³ though one can also see the writing style of Vaughan Williams and Holst represented. A lyrical melody enters in the accompaniment under the women's voices in the pick-up to m. 4. In m. 10 the harmony shifts to E-flat minor, while maintaining the shifting chord pattern of the opening. When the men enter at m. 13 back in E-flat major the accompaniment uses a variation of the material from mm. 3-10, forming a duet between the men and the accompaniment. Conte modifies the accompaniment at m. 17 to allow for a modulation to C major at m. 20. This modulation is used to set up the imperative statement at m. 21 that tells the listeners to close their eyes and listen, for it is music that will reach the heart. Conte further delineates this poetic line by changing the piano accompaniment from shifting chords to a rhythmic ostinato in the left hand and a lyrical melody in the right hand. In this section the text is illustrated by the women's voices playing the part of the siren mentioned at m. 24. Conte also sets the word "sing" in imitative triplets cascading down through the men's parts at m. 24 to create the aural image of the text. When the text talks of being "on the wing of her sweet voice," the women's part soars to illustrate the point. Conte again uses the triplet figure, starting with the basses at m. 29, to depict the word "love". It is the carefree nature of this figure that

⁴³ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

Conte finds so appropriate for both the words “sing” and “love.” Conte now creates a bridge to the next poetic section with a modulation to B-flat major in the accompaniment that builds to a climax at m. 35.

The second section, which begins at m. 36, is based on the poetry of Shelley. Conte uses an impressionistic ostinato pattern in the left hand and fanfares in the right. This left hand figuration is based on Schumann’s piano *Fantasia op. 17*,⁴⁴ while the right hand imitates the melody of the voices (m. 43). The exuberant nature of this passage increases to the point that the beating of the heart can be heard at m. 47 in a pulsing triplet figure. There is then a shift to E-flat major with the introduction of the pitch “a-flat” to color the word “dying” at m. 48. “Dying” is also portrayed by a reduction of vocal rhythmic activity. The harmonic shift of this phrase sets a new mood for the next poetic line (m. 50). Here Conte has the voices enter in imitation, leaping upward to illustrate the text “pour forth the sound” before moving in “enchanted” triplets to a climax on C major for the word “wine.” It is this modulation to C major that Conte uses to sweeten the harmony of the word “wine.” This is then followed by triplets cascading through the voices at m. 56 to show the “loosen” of notes, and climaxing on a D minor seventh chord with prominent “c’s” in the accompaniment. The calm text that follows

⁴⁴ Conte, e-mail, 5 March 2003.

this build-up is set in an equally calming manner as the piano descends in sequences.

Measure 61 starts the text in the grounded low tessitura of the male voices to show the “herbless plane” and then moves to the higher women’s sound to portray “the gentle rain.” It is not until the voices “gasp” out in imitation of one another at m. 65 that the calm feeling changes.

FIGURE 4.16, IN *PRAISE OF MUSIC* MM. 65-66

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With this new idea Conte tonicizes C minor, which strengthens the cadence at m. 69 in the original key of B-flat major. This in turns gives way to D-flat major at m. 73.

A lyrical tenor phrase at m. 75 marks the beginning of the second stanza of Shelley's poem, and Conte once again changes the accompaniment figuration to create a new mood for the poetic idea. The tenors, through their articulation, show the gasping pleas for "more" music. Their pleas are quickly imitated by the other voices as they modulate to D major and climax at m. 87 in the bright key of C Lydian. The choir at m. 87 gasps for more sweet music as the harmony is colored by the raised fourth. At m. 91 the poetry talks of music loosening the serpent of care around the listener's heart to dissolve his strain. This is shown in the music with a slow modulation back to B-flat major through a swirl of choral triplets. (Triplets represent ecstasy or song at many points in this piece). Conte then uses quarter note triplets in imitative writing beginning at m. 99 to show the idea of "dissolving strain."

The poetic section concludes with fourteen bars of piano figuration, which continue the swirling left hand under a lyrical right (m. 107) that brings back a melody similar to that of mm. 42-43. This continues until m. 113 when the rhythmic motion of the left hand slows down from sixteenth notes to eighth notes, followed by a foreshadowing at m. 117 of the melody to be found in the next section. In setting the poetry of Shelley, Conte consistently stresses the ending of the poetic line through sustained notes. This is especially true in the first stanza at mm. 45, 49, 54, 59, and 69.

The second stanza also uses this technique, but because of the more imitative nature of the writing this is often buried in the texture. Not until the end of the second stanza (m. 107) does Conte clearly sustain the end of the poetic line.

Poetry by John Dryden is used for the text in the third section of this composition. A complex harmony over a “d” pedal opens this portion as the solo women’s trio questions what passion music cannot control. The entire passage is in D octatonic. Conte paints the text through an arching vocal line that shows the rising passion before it descends again on “quell.” Once the melody is established, it is restated in an augmented version in the accompaniment at m. 124. The accompaniment then changes into octave “f’s” at m. 128, which represent the plucking of Jubal’s lyre. This light accompaniment diminuendos as the sopranos and tenors enter in canon on what is marked as a sustained, ghostly “white” sound. A solo men’s trio then enters at m. 138 on a transposed version of the women’s entrance from m. 121. At this point the key modulates to G major with phrygian inflections. The accompaniment once again restates the melody of m. 121 at m. 141, acting as a bridge into the next vocal canon. This time the altos and basses state the text in canon, and the phrase ends at m. 155 back in D octatonic. Conte again weaves the melody from m. 121 into the accompaniment combining it with the leaping idea that represented Jubal’s lyre. At m. 162 the first homophonic entrance of this movement

occurs as the men slowly state their text on an ascending E-flat major scale. They are joined by the sopranos on the dominant as they too continue upward to the tonic “e-flat” pitch. Conte closes this movement by bringing back a variation of the idea from m. 121 at its original pitch in canon between the women’s and men’s solo trios at m. 170. This movement is structured around two alternating ideas; the solo “passion” theme, introduced by the women at m. 121, and the choral canon idea, begun at m. 128 and introduced by the sopranos and tenors. Conte alternates the restatements of these ideas, varying them with each repetition. The second “passion” statement is made by the men at m. 138 and is followed at m. 146 by the canon idea. In contrast the canon is now between the altos and the basses. Conte uses yet another variation on this alternating thematic structure at m. 170 by stating the “passion” theme in canon with the men imitating the women.

FIGURE 4.17, IN PRAISE OF MUSIC MM. 170-172

The musical score consists of five vocal staves (Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 7/4. The score begins at measure 170. The lyrics are: "well... can - not Mus - ic... raise... and".

- Soprano 1 (Sop. 1):** Starts with a *mf* dynamic, then a *Sop. 1 solo* section with a *f* dynamic. The lyrics are "can - not Mus - ic... raise... and".
- Soprano 2 (Sop. 2):** Starts with a *mf* dynamic, then a *Sop. 2 solo* section with a *f* dynamic. The lyrics are "can - not Mus - ic... raise... and".
- Alto (A):** Starts with a *solo* section with a *f* dynamic. The lyrics are "What Pas - sion... Well... can - not Mus - ic... raise... and".
- Tenor (T):** Starts with a *(tutti)* section. The lyrics are "raise... solo What... Pas - sion... can - not Mus - ic...".
- Bass (B):** Starts with a *2 solo* section with a *mf* dynamic, then a *(tutti)* section. The lyrics are "well... Pas - sion... can - not Mus - ic...".
- Piano:** Provides harmonic support with chords and a melodic line in the right hand.

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The movement ends with an imitative piano codetta loosely based on material from
mm. 136-7.

Shelley's poetry returns as the text for the fourth poetic movement, and again the accompanimental writing has a flowing churning figuration. Here though, the writing leans more towards that of the minimalist composers and is unique for Conte with its vocal murmuring. The vocal clusters found in this movement are reminiscent of some of the writing found in Reich's *Desert Music*; they add an atmospheric vocal color to the piece. Starting in groups of three, the accompanimental patterns are punctuated by "d's," "c-sharps," and "a-sharps" that leap out of the texture. By the time the bass part begins at m. 191, the length of the repeating patterns has gradually increased from the original three notes, to four-, five-, and finally six-note groupings. The lyrical D major bass line is punctuated at the end of each phrase with rustling tone clusters by the *divissi* women's voices. These clusters take their notes from the now seven-note accompanimental patterns that support them. At m. 196 the basses modulate to F Lydian. The tenors then join the basses at m. 202 on a unison line in C major with the borrowed sixth and seventh from the parallel key of C minor.

The next major change occurs at m. 213 with a shift to C double Lydian which combines the raised fourth of Lydian and the lowered seventh from Mixolydian. There, for the first time, the altos introduce a phrase and the men shift to the textless vocal murmuring. The alto's antecedent phrase is answered by the sopranos, much as the tenors

responded to the basses when they began the movement. Tone clusters sung by the *divisi* altos and tenors conclude the phrase.

Stanza two of Shelley's poem begins at m. 224 with a modulation to B-flat major. At this point the beginning of the new stanza is also marked by the use of all four voices in unison octaves and a change in the figuration of the accompaniment. The voices ascend on a B-flat major scale until the word "charm" where they fan out to a B-flat dominant eleventh chord. At m. 228 Conte illustrates the text "of foaming" by using a leaping motive that is imitated upward in all voices. This is similar to the way he set the text "pour forth" at m. 51 in the earlier movement based on Shelley's poetry. Conte uses additional elements from his previous Shelley text throughout the following section. He uses the leap of an octave in the soprano at m. 242 for the text "her kiss divine." This is the same octave "f" leap that he used in movement two at m. 42 to set the words "I pant for the music which is divine." Both texts emphasize the word "divine." At m. 244 the word "divine" is underscored by the music for "I pant for the music which is divine" from m. 42. This melody is then repeated in the accompaniment as the choir sings various settings of the word "divine." The varied repetition of the word represents the choir being transported to heaven by music.

FIGURE 4.18, *IN PRAISE OF MUSIC* MM. 249-251

249

Tenor
vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy - vy

Semi-Chorus
vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy - vy- vy

Bass
vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy- vy - vy- vy- vy

Soprano

Alto

Tenor
di - vine...
p

Bass
di - vine...
p

di - vine...
p

di - vine...
p

tr

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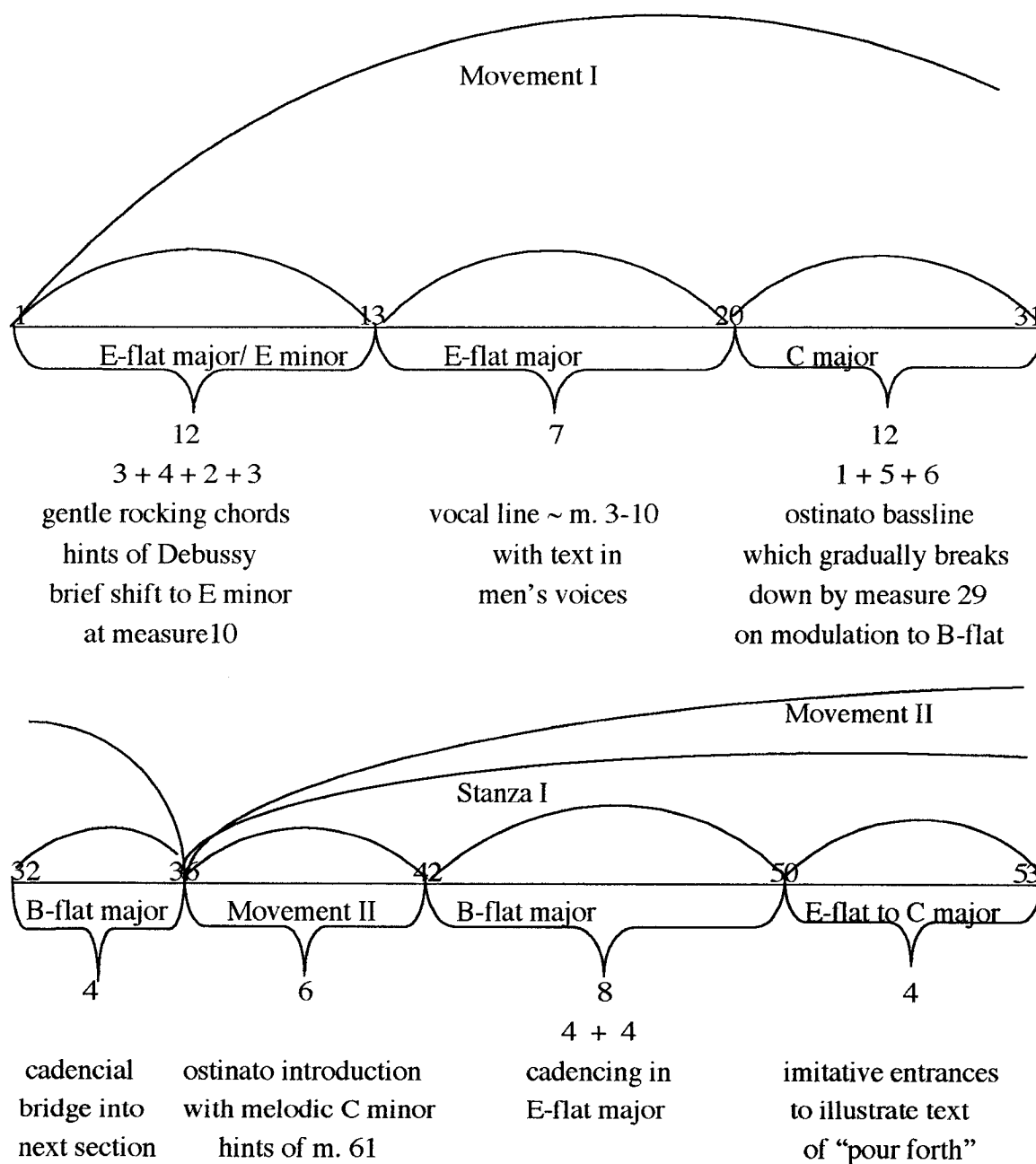
Throughout this closing section there are cadences on dominant F eleventh chords with chromatic inflections of “f-sharp” to “g.” This chromatic movement to the ninth is reminiscent of Holst’s writing found in “Neptune” from *The Planets*. Conte says this symbolizes timelessness, heaven, divine nature, and eternity.⁴⁵

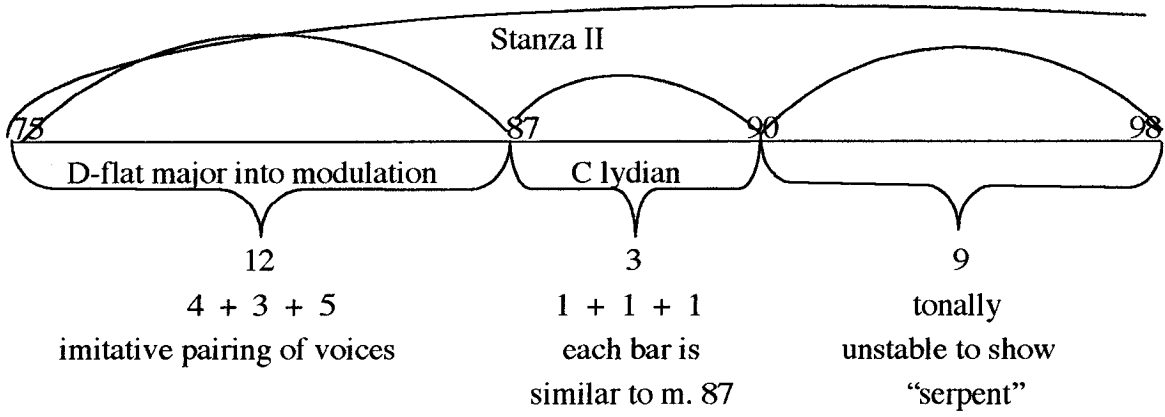
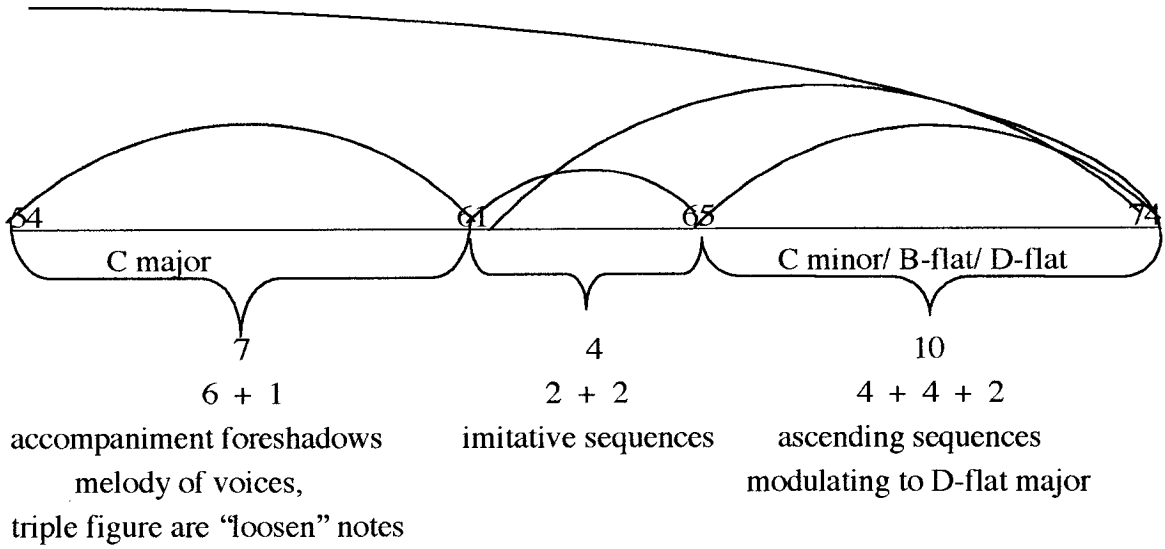
The fifth, and final, section of this cantata is a return of the opening Thomas Carew text. Here the text is set as an *a cappella* chorale to symbolize, as Conte states in his notes, the choirs of heaven as they reaffirm that love can indeed enter through the ear. The chorale opens with a consonant homophonic B-flat major idea. Conte colors the word “eyes” in m. 6 with B-flat minor as if to show that it is wrong to believe the eyes are the only way in which the body can take in love. He then shows love’s fatal darts through the imitative descending phrases at m. 273. The next line, “close up those casements,” then modulates to C major. This is the same tonality used to set this text in the first movement, and at m. 276 the tenors use a brief portion of that earlier melody from m. 21. At the word “sing” in m. 279 Conte brings back the triplet figure from m. 24 that demonstrated the same word. The bass and alto parts in m. 280 then use the earlier melodic shape of the tenor line (m. 23) to set the text “this siren sing.” At m. 282 the unison choir quotes the melody from mm. 26-28 as it modulates back to B-flat major

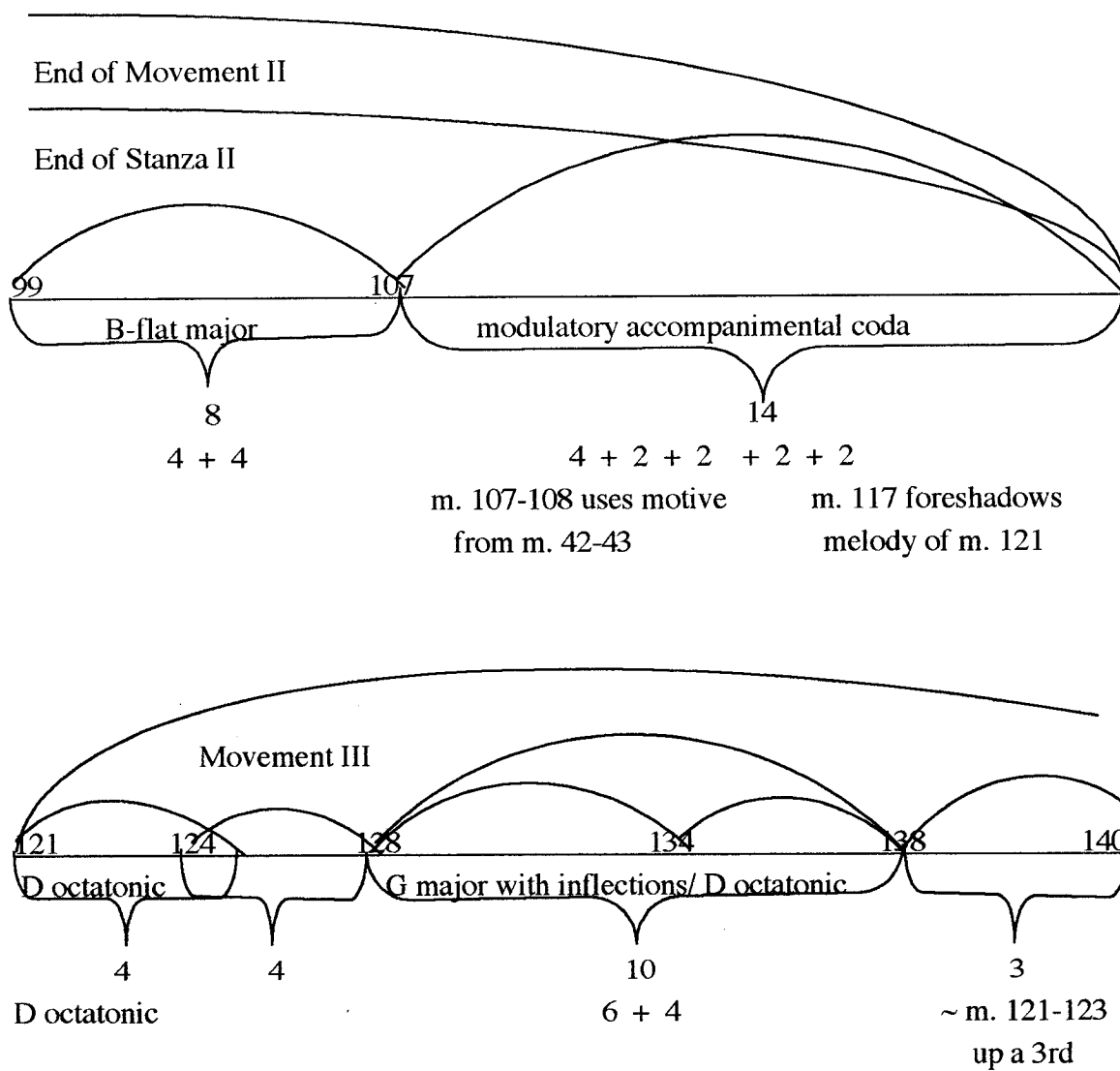
⁴⁵ Conte, telephone conversation, 29 May 2003.

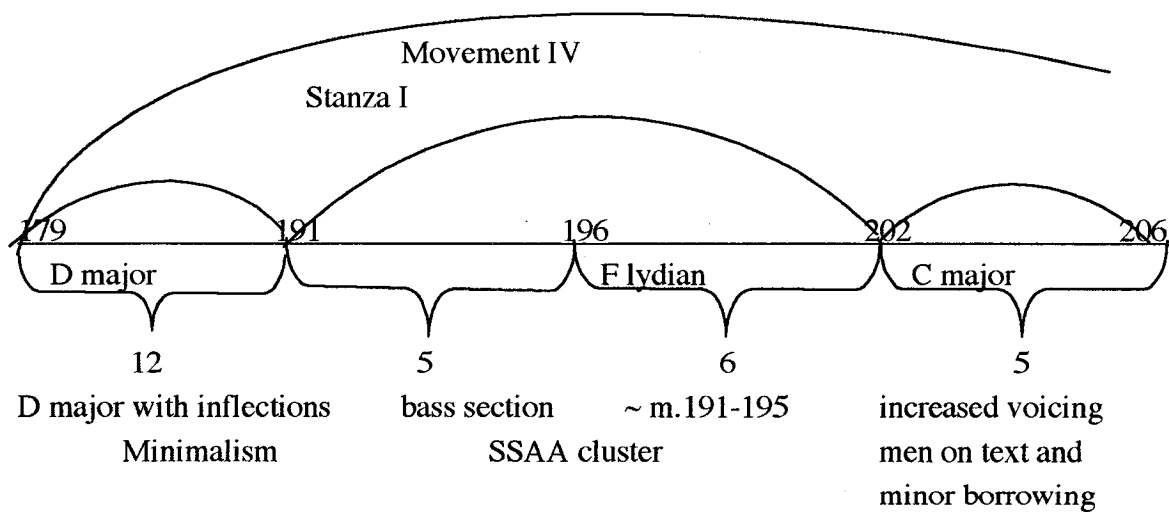
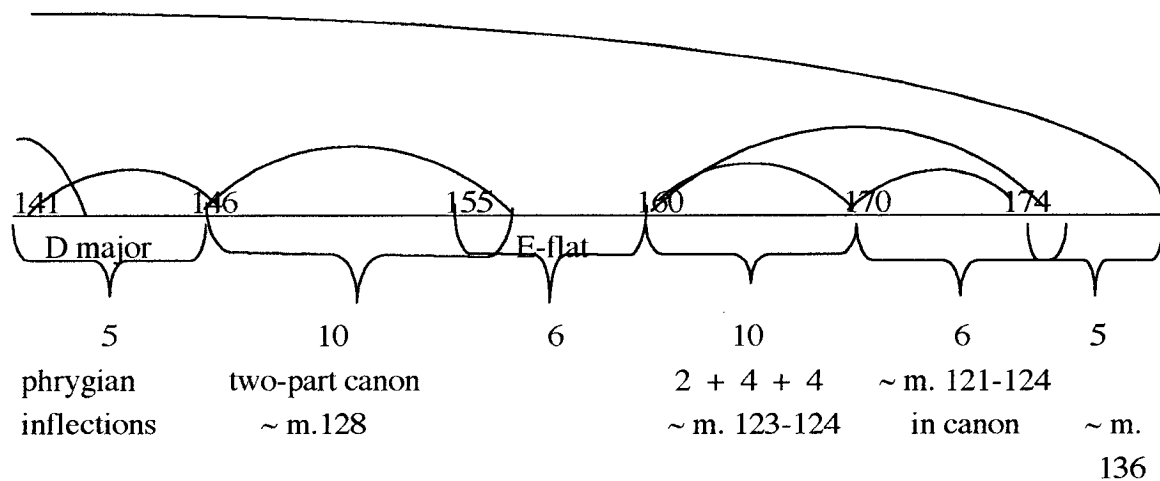
arriving on the word “appear.” This is then followed by four-part imitation at m. 286 in B-flat minor based on the bass’s motive from m. 29. The cantata ends with a homophonic setting of mm. 30-32 with the addition of two extra beats, concluding on the Picardy B-flat major chord for the word “ear.”

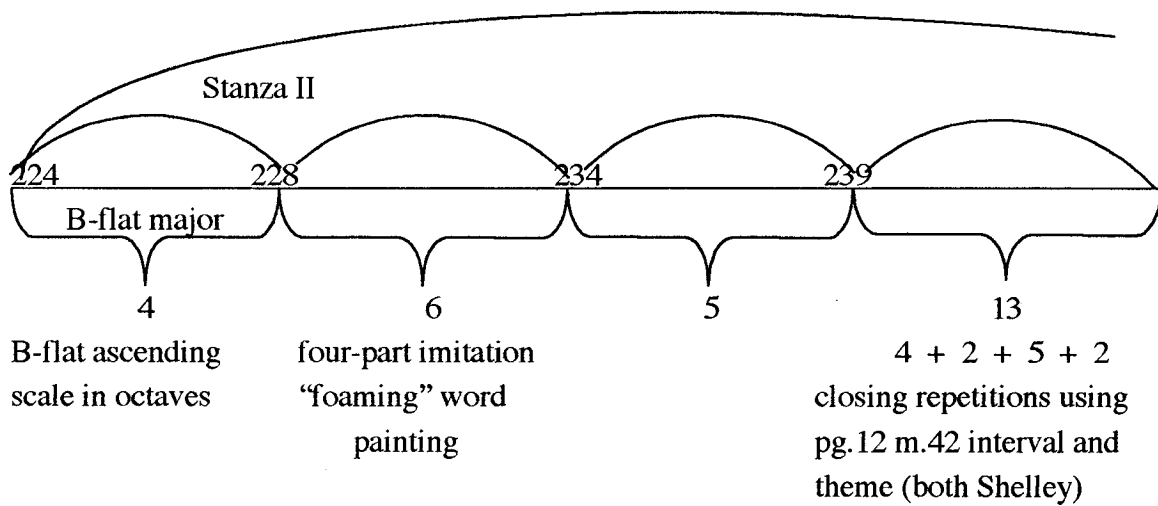
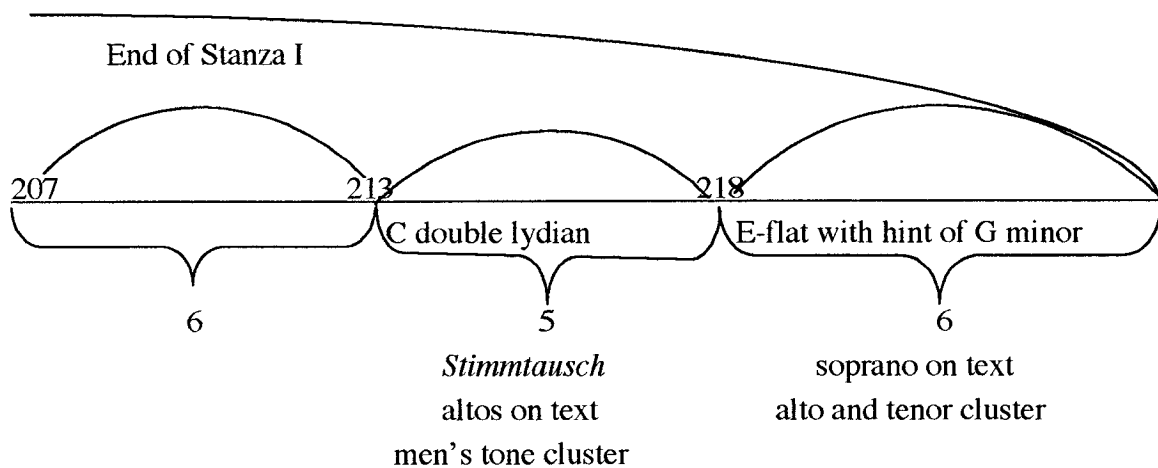
CHART 4.4, IN PRAISE OF MUSIC

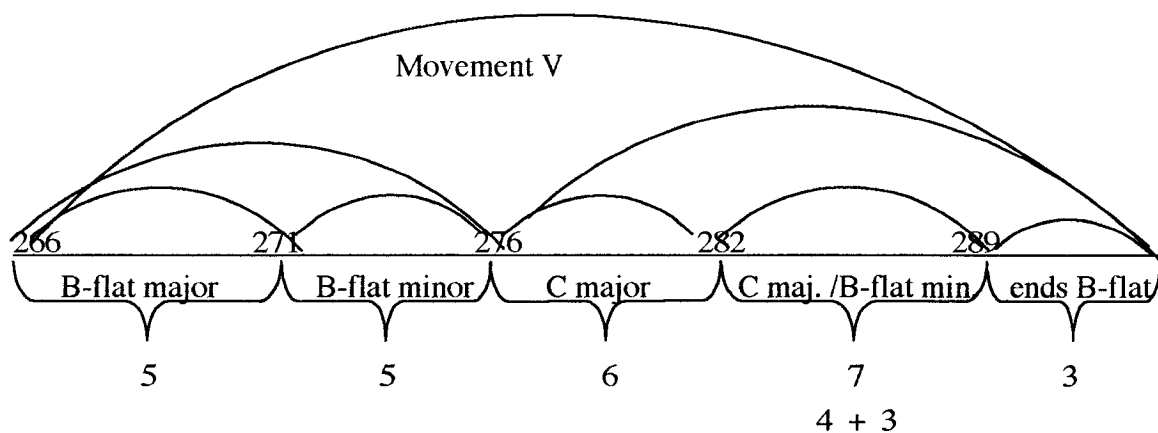
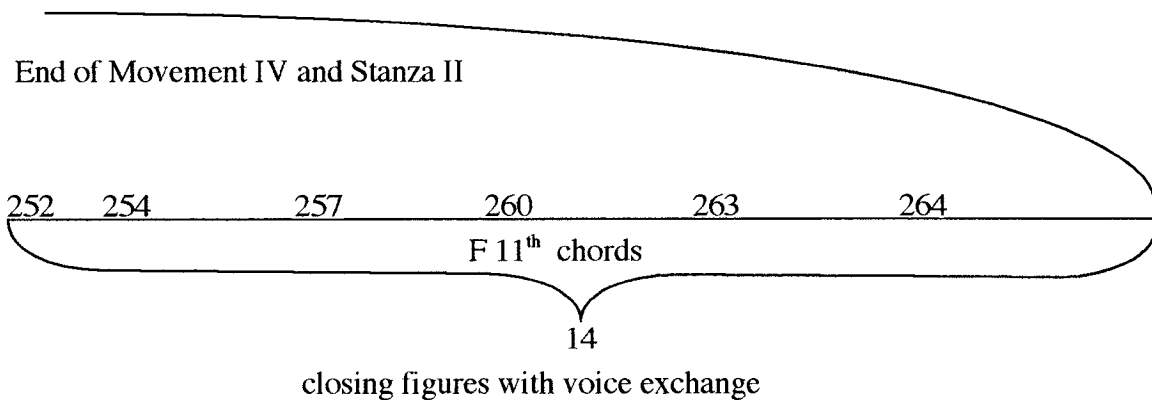












chorale based on text and rhythm of opening mvt.	tenor has a melody similar to m. 17 Downward word painting of "fatal dart"	tenors open with melody from m. 21	opens with unison from m. 26-28 imitative "love" modulates to B-flat	uses the rhythm of m.30-32 with two extra beats Picardy ending
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Charm Me Asleep

Charm Me Asleep was written in 1993 on a poem by Robert Herrick entitled *To Music-To Becalm His Fever*. The work was commissioned by the San Francisco male vocal ensemble Chanticleer and was premiered at the World Symposium on Choral Music in Vancouver, British Columbia in August of the same year. Chanticleer recorded the work within a month of its completion. However, their recording differs from the published score. After recording the work, Conte rewrote mm. 76, 83, and 85 taking the sopranos higher. The American Repertory Singers of the National Shrine in Washington, DC, have since recorded it in the published version under the direction of Leo Nestor, although at this time it has not been released.

Charm Me Asleep is based on a poem written in the first person, by someone who is on his death bed racked with fever, entreating music to soothe his pain. This is one of several works in this study that have a text dealing with music, the others being *In Praise of Music* and *The Composer*. As the poem proceeds the speaker goes through an emotional progression. He asks that if music cannot kill his fever then let it bring on sleep, which is a metaphor for death. The work has the gentle rocking three-four beginning of a lullaby starting on one note. In discussions with the composer, he mentioned that people often do not hold the opening “e-flat” long enough. “It is marked

long. I think the longer you hold it the better. It is meant to set up the sound world. It's like opening... looking in the door. You see and then as you get closer the texture fills out, but it's inviting you in."⁴⁶

Conte says that in this piece he felt inspired by the works of Poulenc, Walton, and his friend Conrad Susa. It is not that he was borrowing from specific works of theirs, but rather that the overall feel of their pieces is present in this work.

The A section opens in E-flat major with the four-note melodic motive, and has its first cadence on the expressive mediant chord for the word "asleep" (m. 3). This line is written in such a way as to lead to, and place a gentle weight on, the word "asleep." He then goes on to set the text in such a way that the "melting" quality is clearly represented by the shifting rhythms taking place between the voices. Throughout this section there is extensive use of the iii chord (G minor) which Conte feels gives the section a sensitive aspect⁴⁷ The B theme quickly follows in m. 6 at "with thy delicious numbers" where the text is portrayed through the use of imitation between the voices. It is this imitation of multiple weaving parts that creates the idea of "delicious numbers." Here the phrase cadences on the solemn IV chord (m. 9). John Curwen, the nineteenth century

⁴⁶ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

pedagogue, wrote that this chord had a religious aura about it. Think, for example, of the plagal cadence and its association with the churches' "amen." Conte connects this chord with solemnity, and to make it into a ninth chord only heightens that feeling. It is not until the word "ravished" at m. 12 that there is a pull to another tonality. This harmonic shift gives color to the word "ravished;" the "g-flat" is introduced and there is the inflection of the parallel minor, E-flat. In m. 15 the "g-flat" is set against a "g-natural" as a cross-relation. It is this cross-relation that gives forward energy to the word "go," both illustrating its meaning (to die) with the dissonance and propelling the piece onward.

FIGURE 4.19, *CHARM ME ASLEEP* MM. 13-16

The musical score for "Charm Me Asleep" (mm. 13-16) is presented in a system with four vocal staves and two piano staves. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is marked with dynamics such as *f*, *mf*, and *mp*, and includes performance directions like "Moving forward", "rall.", and "Tempo I". The lyrics are: "hence I go I go A-way in eas-y rav-ished, Hence, I go, I go A-way in eas-y rav-ished, Hence I go, I go A-way in eas-y rav-ished, Hence, I go A-way in eas-y". The piano accompaniment features triplets and dynamic markings like *f* and *mp*.

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This cross-relation and the gentle rocking that follows is something that Conte sees as coming from his study of the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams. One can see this chordal rocking back and forth in many of Vaughan Williams's pieces such as his *Magnificat* for women's voices. Conte then traces it still farther back to the works of Purcell and Byrd.⁴⁸ The opening A section cadences on the IV chord of "slumbers" in m. 18, again creating the atmosphere of solemnity. At this point the vocal writing also slows, changing from the active eighth note writing of "I go" to the quarter and half note writing of "slumber." The parts reach the second syllable of "slumber" in succession, as if one by one they fall asleep.

The B section begins at the pick-up to m. 20 with "O ease my head" and goes through a quick series of modulations before cadencing in C-flat major at m. 35. Throughout this section, however, C-flat major is challenged by C-flat minor with the "d-naturals" which are enharmonic with "e-double-flat." Conte uses word painting at m. 27 with an increase of tempo to express the word "quickly." He also colors the word "kill" at m. 31 with the dissonance set up by the cross-relation between this "d-natural" and the "d-flat."

The next large section, beginning at m. 36, is characterized by its rhythmic texture

⁴⁸ Ibid.

which is almost recitative in style. By this point the piece has moved to E-flat minor with brief tonicizations of the IV chord, A-flat major. At m. 38 there is a depiction of the contrasting qualities of fire, from the energized eighth note triplet which leads into the “consuming fire” at m. 39, to the slower more relaxed quarter note triplet of “gentle licking flames” in m. 40. This C section is homophonic in nature, contrasting with the primarily imitative writing up to this point.

FIGURE 4.20, *CHARM ME ASLEEP* MM. 38-41

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The section climaxes with a richly complex phrase including E-flat octatonic inflections at m. 42. It is not until the closing word “expire” that the harmonic rhythm

slows and a half cadence on the B-flat dominant is created. Here again Conte makes wonderful use of word painting with the slowing and reduction of parts to show the phrase “expire.”

There is a recapitulation beginning at m. 47 with the return of the A theme and the home key, E-flat major. With the recapitulation of musical ideas there is also a poetic recapitulation with the rhyme between the opening’s “Charm me asleep” and mm. 47-48 “then make me weep.” It is as if Conte wishes to point out that these are the only two places where that particular rhyme occurs, and so connects them poetically and musically. Conte is also fairly consistent in his portrayal of the word “pain,” using dissonant writing throughout this recapitulation (e.g. mm. 49 and 68) where half-step or seventh intervals are found. This is followed by the return of the B section at m. 53 and the C section at m. 58. The C section is not based so much on a melodic theme as much as on the rhythmic texture in a recitative-like style. Within this A-flat major C section there are mixolydian inflections employed through the “g-flat” in “those maiden showers” of mm. 60-61. This section then cadences on the I chord with the added sixth at m. 61. Conte points out that this is seen a lot in Debussy. It would also be used by Mahler in his *Lied von der Erde* ending on a C major chord with the added A. “Some people say it is a farewell to the nineteenth century because it is a kind of tonic that had never been

used before.”⁴⁹ The “g-flat” used in this section then sets up the move to E-flat minor at m. 62, which in turn modulates to E-flat major and sets up the return of the A section at m. 67 and the B theme at m. 70. Conte views these returns of the various themes, particularly the A theme, as a loose rondo form.⁵⁰ Throughout this recapitulation there is a pull towards C minor beginning at m. 69 with the “c” pedal, but the overall key of this final section is E-flat major. The piece then comes to a climax at m. 77 as the voices use upward planing to reach their peak on a vi chord. The emotional tension created at this moment illustrates the anxious mind of the speaker as he gives himself over to death and his flight to heaven. In mm. 79-81 the B theme returns once more as the speaker relaxes and the work cadences. The final cadence is not on E-flat major, however, or the relative C minor which has been used extensively in this recapitulation; rather, it cadences on the parallel major of C minor, C major. It is this raised Picardy third, the “e-flat” to “e-natural” that Conte views as the speaker’s soul going off to heaven.⁵¹ This C major chord, though a surprise, has been hinted at with a great number of C minor chords throughout the build to the climax.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Throughout *Charm Me Asleep* Conte maintains a forward motion. This is achieved by having very few cadences on a V or I chord. He chooses instead to go to iii chords or IV chords that give the piece a feeling of being propelled onward. There is also a repeated build-up of energy followed by release, as if the speaker becomes agitated and sits bolt upright in bed only to become exhausted by his fever and collapse down again. This can be heard in the contrast that occurs between mm. 20 and 35 at which point the speaker begins to grow agitated once more. Conte also creates a seamless texture by eliding his phrases with very few points of complete silence in the choir parts. The first complete break in the texture occurs at m. 35 with the start of stanza two, the next at m. 58 with the beginning of stanza three. Another break occurs with the return of the A theme in m. 67. The final two breaks in the choral texture happen at mm. 72 and 75. At these points the speaker, in his final breaths of life, gives up his soul and begins his journey to heaven. It is as if the choir collectively has to regroup before giving themselves over to death.

CHART 4.5, CHARM ME ASLEEP

A section

Stanza I

1 — 6 — 7 — 10 — 15

E-flat major E-flat minor/major

3 + 3 6 3 5 5

2 + 3

Theme A Theme B pull of G minor variations on Theme A and B E-flat major/minor "rocking"

B section **C section** Stanza II

20 — 27 — 36 — 42

G-flat major E-flat minor

4 + 3 7 8 6 5

4 + 2

Imitation on Theme B "quick" harmonic shift A major/G-flat major Homophonic texture word painting of "expire," modulation back to E-flat major/octatonic

Recapitulation of A and B sections Stanza III

47 — 58 — 62 — 67 — 73

E-flat major/ G minor A-flat major E-flat minor E-flat major/ G minor C minor

11 4 5 6 2

2 + 9 2 + 2 3 + 2 4 + 2

~ 1-4 but reminiscent of 1-12 Theme A Deceptive cadence Theme A and B Homophonic

75 — 79 — 83

C major

4 4 2

Theme B

Candles in the Wilderness

Candles in the Wilderness is a short choral work taken from Conte's first opera *The Dreamers* which was commissioned for the Sonoma City Opera Company's sesquicentennial celebration in 1996. Based on a libretto by Phillip Littell, the opera tells the story of the founding of the city of Sonoma, California. The addition of this chorus as an interlude between acts three and four was the suggestion of the show's director Sandra Bernhard who felt it would help bridge the jump in time from 1848 to the 1890's. Because the opera takes place in the nineteenth century, Conte sets this piece in the style of a Stephen Foster parlor song using a simple flowing structure. The work is in F major and begins with the introduction of the melody in the accompaniment. In m. 5 the sopranos add the text to that melody, all the while acting more as a soloist with choral accompaniment than as part of a four-voice choral texture. Soft emphasis is given by the lower three voices to the key words, "candle," "star," and "sky."

FIGURE 4.21. *CANDLES IN THE WILDERNESS* MM. 4-8

The musical score consists of five staves. The top four staves are for the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The bottom staff is for the Piano. The vocal parts are in 3/4 time and feature lyrics: "Candles in the wilderness, Stars in the sky." The piano accompaniment is in 3/4 time and features a moving eighth-note figure in the right hand and a homophonic bass line. Dynamics include *mf*, *mp*, and *p*.

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Throughout the work the musical phrases group themselves based on the poetic patterns.

The first portion of the piece has two ideas. Measures 5-10 comprise the first idea, which is divided into two smaller phrases of four measures plus two. This is followed by the second grouping from mm. 11-15 which is then grouped in phrases of three plus two.

Within this opening section, the moving eighth notes in the right hand symbolize the flickering of the candle flame. At m. 16, where the third stanza begins, the piece has a more homophonic writing style and gives a more equal level of melodic importance to the four voice parts. Conte writes an ascending accompaniment figure starting at m. 18

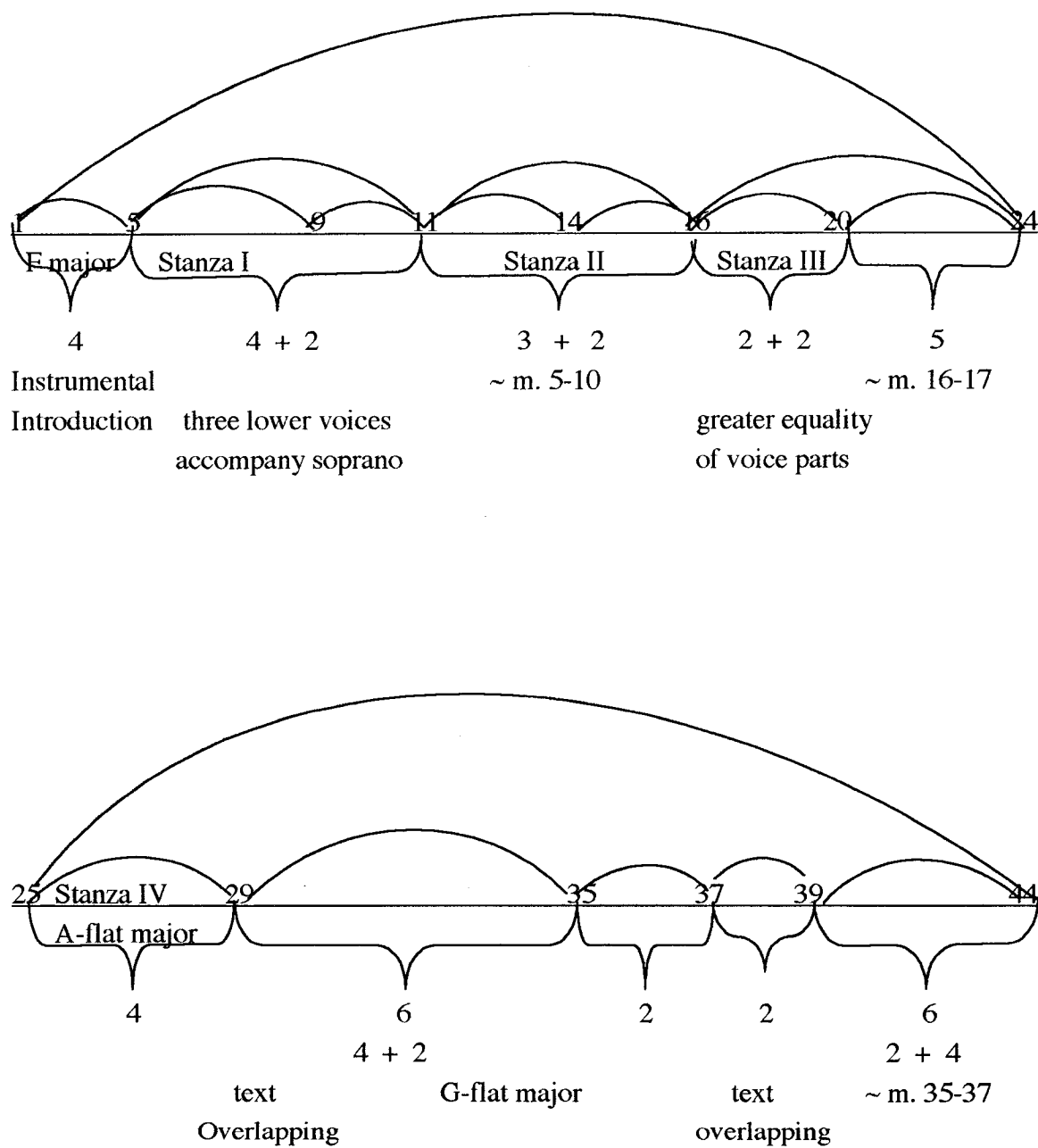
that brings about a strong cadence on the tonic “f” at m. 20. This helps give the piece the more straightforward nature that Conte was striving for in the opera. The section grows in intensity until its climax in m. 22 on the word “home.” A G major ninth chord emphasizes the word “home,” the idea of which, along with “neighbor,” is the central focus of this piece.

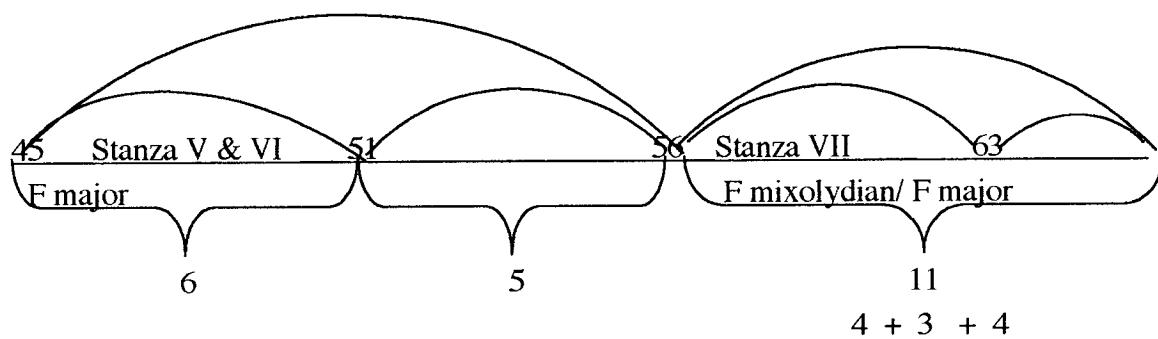
For stanza four, Conte modulates to a version of the third of the opening key with the new tonality of A-flat major at m. 25. Here he introduces an accompanimental rhythmic figure in the right hand to represent the clomping of horse’s hooves as the villagers travel to greet their new neighbors. At this point the choral writing returns to the simpler soprano soloist and lower voice accompanimental idea for the first four bars of the stanza. Conte then speeds the piece along by telescoping the text, having the soprano sing portions of the poetry while the other three parts sing different phrases of the text. The voices come together for the climax on the repeated two-bar phrase “what a sight tonight” with a G-flat major ninth chord at m. 33. The men then diminuendo as they repeat this text while the women continue with additional words. Throughout this cadencial repetition the harmony moves closer towards the original key, finally arriving on a dominant C major cadence on the word “night” at m. 43.

There is then a recapitulation of thematic material at m. 45 and a return to

F major. The men take on the role of soloist using the A theme for the text of stanza five, while the women, in a more accompanimental manner, use the text of stanza six. At m. 48 the men's voices portray the flickering nature of "guttering" by the use of the descending eighth note figures. This section is also divided into two phrases of six and five bars respectively that come to cadences both times on a I chord. Conte then shows the movement to stanza seven at m. 56 by the use of "e-flat" in mixolydian inflections. This is done to darken the color of the text "darkened window." It also allows for a brief movement to the minor dominant at m. 59. This stanza builds to its climax at m. 60 on a G-flat major chord. There is then a cadencial modulation bringing the movement back to F major ending at m. 63. The accompaniment rounds out the piece, going home so to speak, with one final reference to the opening theme.

CHART 4.6, CANDLES IN THE WILDERNESS





Recapitulation

Elegy for Matthew

Elegy for Matthew uses a text by John Stirling Walker. It was commissioned by James Geiger in memory of Matthew Shepard, the college student beaten and left to die on the cold Wyoming prairie. The work was premiered in its TTBB version at Carnegie Hall in New York City on June 17, 1999 by the New York Gay Men's Chorus under the direction of Barry Oliver. In September of 2000 the choir and orchestra of St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City premiered the SATB version under the direction of William Trafka.

Composed in two movements the opening section of the first movement begins with a low D minor pulsing in the left hand followed by an ascending bass motive in the right hand. Conte cites Britten's *Sinfonia de Requiem* and Brahms' *Requiem* as sources of inspiration for this section.⁵² The *Sinfonia*, which is in six-eight, starts with a low subdued "d" pulsing figure followed by an ever-developing ascending motive that leads to an abrupt *fortissimo* figure. Conte takes these elements and makes them truly his own. After setting the dark mood with the pulsing "d's" Conte adds an element of violence to the scene with the *fortissimo* ascending figure in mm. 3 and 5. At m. 9 the pulsing figure takes over again with a restatement similar to mm. 1 and 2. The level of intensity

⁵² Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

increases with the angular unison choral entrance at m. 11 for the word “memory.” It is the dotted rhythm that gives the word its dramatic punch. Underneath this entrance the piano continues to churn using its earlier motives. The level of tension increases when the choir restates their outcry, this time on an “e-flat” against the “d” in the accompaniment. This builds until the choral unison breaks out into harmony as it moves from the word “maketh” to the D minor chord for the word “martyrs” at m. 15. It is as if all the voices of the world are crying out together against the murder of another human being. This phrase ends on a striking dissonant E major minor minor ninth chord for the word “men.” The melodic idea is further developed after an accompanimental bridge of increasing rhythmic energy at m. 16 that ends on a G-sharp diminished chord at m. 21. This chord is then revoiced in the choral parts at m. 24, where line two of the poetry begins, and becomes a consonant G major chord to illustrate the word “sweet.” The rhythm of this phrase is much less active to portray the text “sweet refrain.” Though the tonality at this moment has become brighter and the right hand has a new celestial figuration, it cannot be sustained against the undercurrent of foreboding. Line three is set at m. 30 with a unison choral D major figure that is imitated in the piano and is again rhythmically active to contrast the calm nature of the preceding phrase. The ascending melodic phrase of m. 30 crescendos and then abruptly ends with the *subito mezzo piano* of the fourth line of

poetry at m. 32. Here Conte uses an angular military trumpet figure, which echoes throughout the voices and piano, to portray the battle with the enemy that is to come for the text “tricks the ear, taunts the enemy.” Again it is the rhythmic articulation that embodies the text with power. The line climaxes on the word “truth” in m. 34 on a C major eleventh chord with lydian inflection.

FIGURE 4.22, *ELEGY FOR MATTHEW*, MOVEMENT 1, MM. 32-34

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The next section of the first movement, which begins at m. 36, modulates to B major with an angelic accompanimental figure similar to that of m. 25. This return of the descending accompanimental figuration underscores the gentle nature of Matthew,

who is being sung about by the choir. The voices sing out in overlapping imitation which cadences in B major at m. 42. In the next repetition of the text (m. 45) Conte uses word painting to show the word “sing” in the women’s part as they use a slightly more melismatic setting of the word. This is followed by a rhythmically active “angelic” harp-like idea at m. 47 that builds to the close of the phrase on the word “angels” with a G-sharp minor chord.

The final line of this portion, which begins at m. 50, quickly fades away at m. 51 as the tonality gently rocks between G and B minor over the pulsing “d” in the bass. The first movement quietly retreats to a subdued C major ending for the word “silently,” which then modulates to D major. Though D major is still present, there is a strong dominant feel to this ending with the accompaniment’s A major ascending figures and “a” pulsing pedal for the last six measures.

Movement two begins in a very unstable D minor over a “d” pedal that is not truly established until m. 6 and then ends at m. 8 with a D major chord. The harmony throughout this movement is in constant change shifting from one tonal center to the next for brief moments. At m. 9 the piece takes on the bright quality of G major as the vocal phrase begins. The accompaniment has a carefree manner about it, but the joy of this key is fleeting, as the lyric text suggests, and D minor returns to highlight the word “youth” in

m. 13. There is then a modulation to E-flat major at m. 21. Conte is very careful to keep the tonality fluid throughout this movement, playing with major and minor tonalities to portray the text, such as m. 27 where “fear” is set in F minor. This is then answered with “pride” in D major at m. 29.

The movement has an ornamented recapitulation beginning at m. 31. When the restatement of the vocal part begins at m. 38, Conte varies it from the original by rescoring the solo line for vocal pairs in canon. The imitation of mm. 1-30 ends on the sustained D major of “pride” in m. 55. Throughout the second half of this section there is a “yearning” motive, which is introduced in the sopranos and tenors at m. 49. It then becomes part of the accompaniment until the end of this section at m. 56--as if the yearning goes on and on.

The next section, beginning at m. 57, is in E minor and brings back the rhythmic pulse of the first movement. This dissonant pulsing motive is contrasted with a lyrical melody in the right hand of the piano. One can easily sense a portrayal of good versus evil in these contrasting ideas. The unison choir line ascends calmly as stanza II begins until it breaks into parts for the word “hell-bent.” “Hellbent” is colored with the introduction of the “d-sharp” which enharmonically helps creates the half-diminished chord at this point. The accompaniment becomes much more active as the emotional

intensity increases. After a series of diminished chords, the choir sustains E minor chords to show the cold prairie where Matthew's murder took place. The "cold prairie" is colored with the "d-sharp" and "f-sharp" that were just heard in the "hellbent" chord underscoring the evil that was to happen there. At m. 68 the choir makes its last statement before Matthew's murder. Conte further creates the drama of the event in an extremely angry outcry, with multiple accents to portray the furious blows that would be delivered to Matthew, when the choir sings "To hatred's dark malignant blows." The pianist strikes minor chords that pass through B major and end on a low G-sharp minor chord. These blocks of sound are reminiscent of a full church organ with the pedal notes giving a deep foundation to the work.

FIGURE 4.23, *ELEGY FOR MATTHEW*, MOVEMENT 2, MM. 67-69

67

Subito più mosso, furioso (♩ = 96)

sub. ff *marcato*

To ha - tred's dark ma - lig - nant blows

sub. ff *marcato*

To ha - tred's dark ma - lig - nant blows

sub. ff *marcato*

To ha - tred's dark ma - lig - nant blows

sub. ff *marcato*

To ha - tred's dark ma - lig - nant blows

Subito più mosso, furioso (♩ = 96)

sub. p *ff*

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The start of the fight that would end Matthew's life is signaled at m. 69 with one last call to battle and the return of the rhythmic fanfare motive of m. 32 in the bass line. The battle cries intensify throughout this dark violent instrumental drama. Suddenly in m. 72 the "b-flat" is introduced with the G minor chord as a quick view of Matthew's life and magic shows through. This chord is taken from m. 51 of the first movement where the text had the angels singing in envy of the magic that Matthew had achieved in hidden spheres. The battle continues as the pulsing fateful "d" of the first movement returns and

the “b-flat” succumbs to the harsh tonality that is crushing in upon it. As the final blow is delivered at the climax in m. 75, the “b-flat” resolves to a “b-natural” in the B minor chord. The B minor chord is then arpeggiated downward to death with the pulsing “d” as Matthew’s life slips from his body. This is the last time that Matthew’s pulse will sound in the work. It is quite easy to visualize his return to the earth in the descending line followed by the ascent of his spirit in the rising accompaniment figures. The choir concludes the work as the voices of angels singing at m. 78. Conte brings back the music of the angels from m. 57 of the first movement in the accompaniment, although it is now down a whole step from where it was and has changed to minor to symbolize grief. There is then a brief return of the first movement’s m. 61 at m. 82. In m. 84 Conte portrays the pain that love caused with the dissonance of the “e” and “d” in the chord. This is then followed by the ringing of church bells in the piano part. At m. 86 the word “love” has a descending sigh motive in the altos that is then elongated in the sopranos at m. 88. It is at this point that the overall D minor of the piece finally modulates to D major as Matthew ascends to heaven. As in *Charm Me Asleep*, Conte uses the raising of the third from minor to major as a metaphor for the ascension of the soul to heaven.

James Maroney, in an article for the *Choral Journal*, suggests that in order to cover the parts Conte has reduced for piano, one might consider using a second piano.

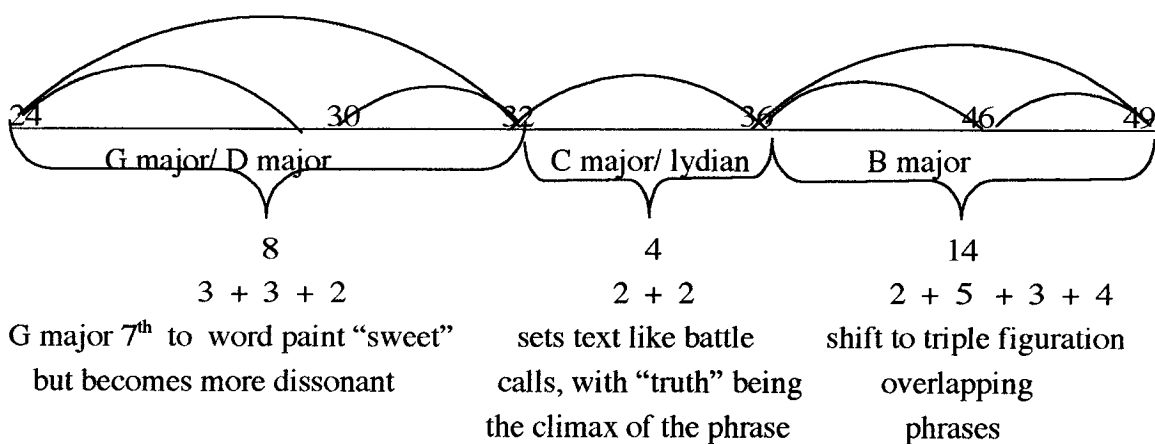
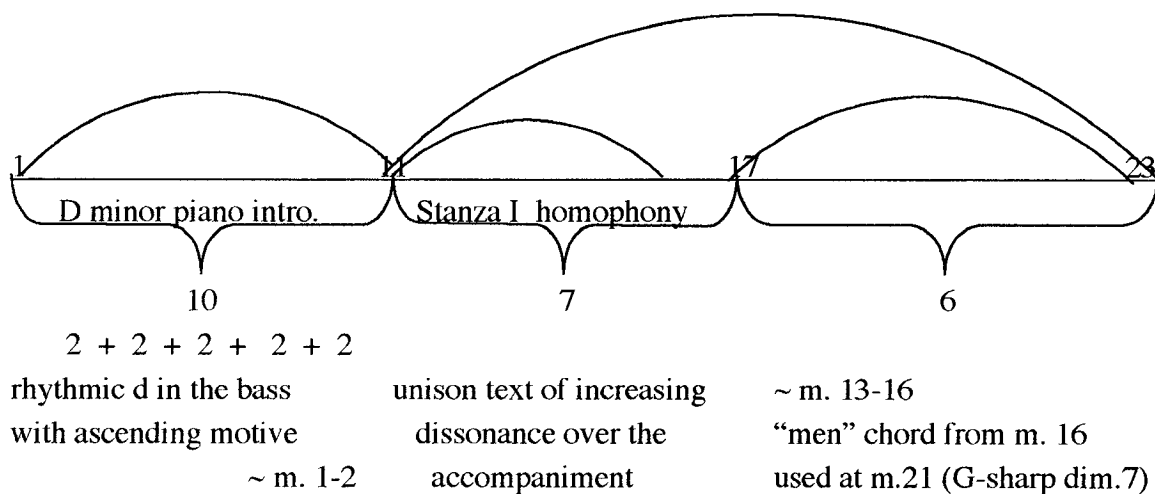
Maroney states that to reduce the part further would take away its full magnitude and would not bring about a favorable outcome.⁵³ In discussing this idea with Conte, he points out that the piano score is not a reduction at all, but rather his original composition on which the orchestration was based.⁵⁴

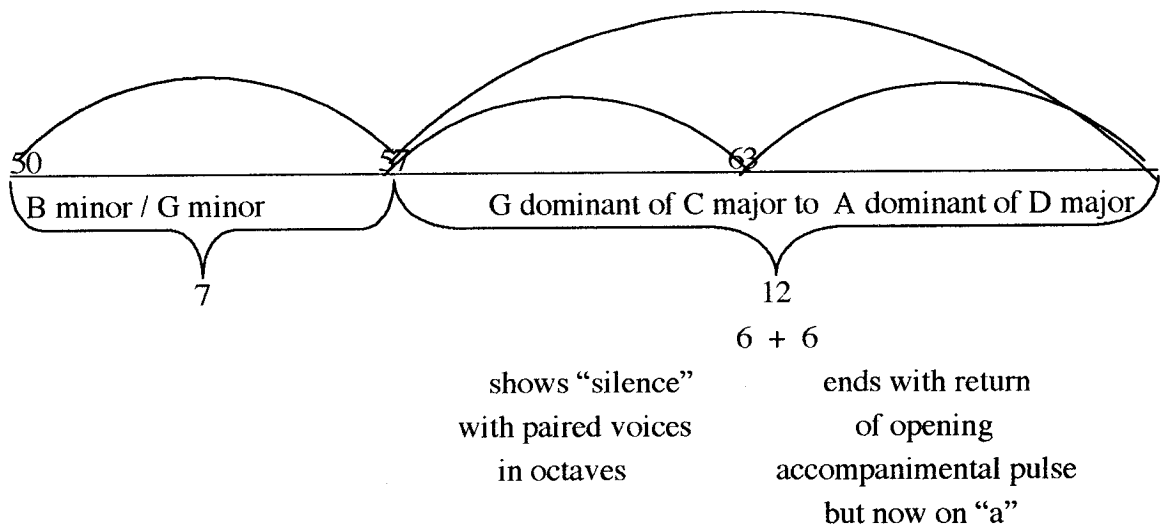
⁵³ James Maroney, "Elegy for Matthew": David Conte," *Choral Journal* (November 2000): 93.

⁵⁴ David Conte, e-mail correspondence with author, 19 April 2003.

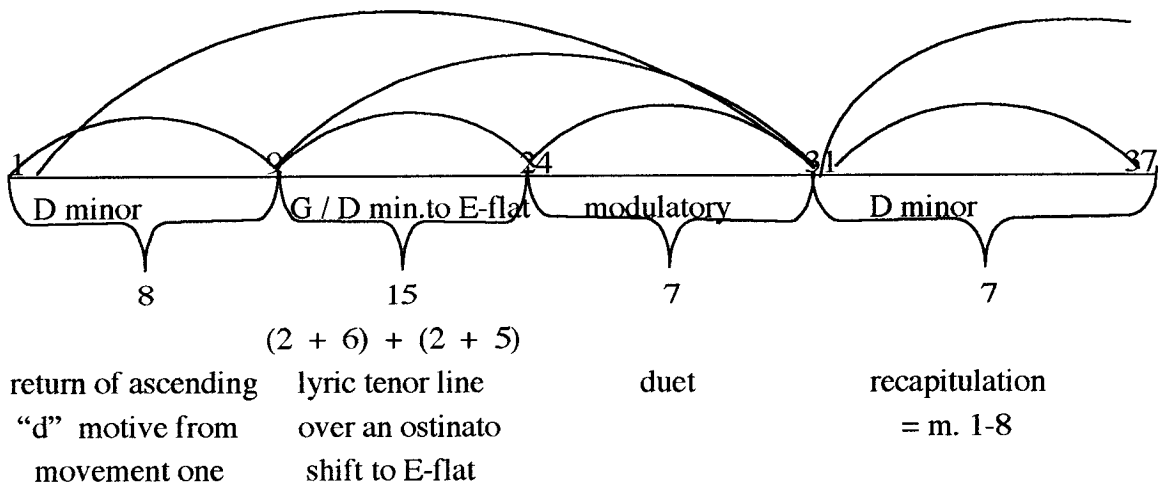
CHART 4.7, ELEGY FOR MATTHEW

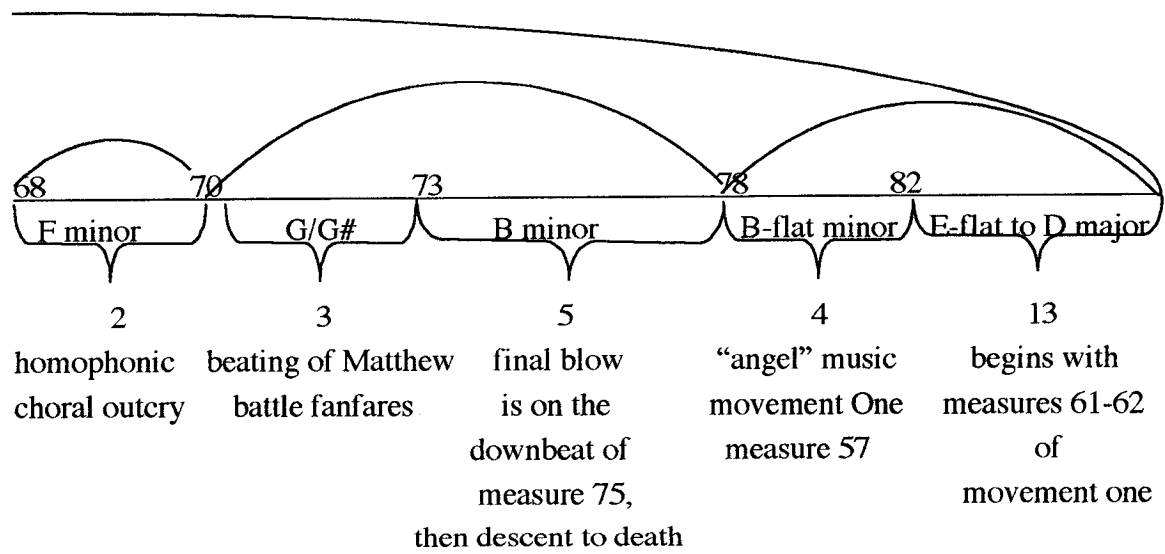
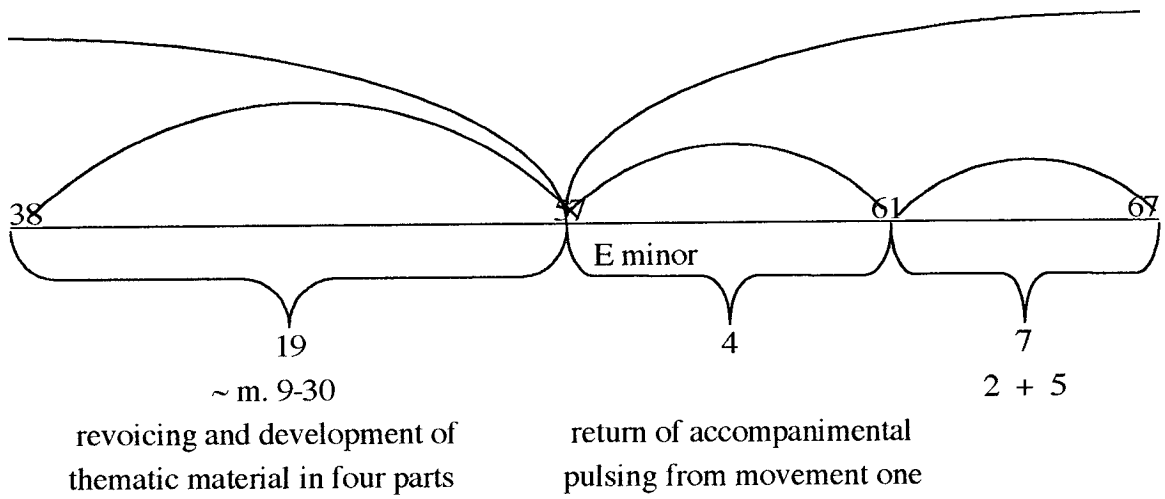
Part I





Part II





The Composer

The Composer was written in 2002 for The Walden School in Dublin, New Hampshire for its summer Festival Week Concert. It was commissioned in honor of the school's thirtieth anniversary season and was sung by every member of the Walden School community. The choir's participants ranged from the youngest student, age ten, to the oldest members of the faculty, administration, and staff. Leo Wananchek, the premier's conductor, found the entire rehearsal process involved in learning the work to be a true community builder. There had been discussion before the project began between Wanenchak and Conte about the need for additional inclusive language in the text. After further discussion it was decided Conte's view that the text stood solidly without inclusive language was correct. The text was not changed,⁵⁵ and the work premiered as the culmination of the summer's music program on August 2, 2002.

A wonderfully sensitive, flowing work, *The Composer* is based on a text of John Stirling Walker and set for a *cappella* choir. Beginning in E-flat major on a single pitch (as many of the works in this study do) the piece then expands by fourths into a rich B-flat eleventh chord foreshadowing the home key of B-flat major. The word "music" is portrayed like the strumming of a harp in the consecutive ascending entrances of the

⁵⁵ Leo Wanenchak, e-mail correspondence with author, 22 January 2003.

voices. This happens again at mm. 4 and 34. The opening musical phrase is then restated at m. 4 in variation. With the bass an octave lower than its opening and a revoicing of the alto and tenor, this statement gives the impression of having been entirely lowered. There is then an E-flat minor pull at m. 6. A harmonic shift establishes the home key of B-flat major with the cadences on the word “music” at mm. 8, 10, and 12. Conte, however, only allows the tonic to remain for a quarter note before moving to the mediant of the key with D minor seventh chords. Once again it is the mediant of the key that Conte feels is so sensitive. This opening section has acted as a vocal introduction.

The actual beginning of the poem starts a new musical section at m. 15. Again the use of a single or unison pitch is employed as a focal point for a new idea. Conte borrows from the parallel minor to portray the text “in restless moments” giving a momentary pull from the B-flat major tonality. He also sets the word “restless” on a dotted quarter and eighth note in the upper voices to show the restless nature of the word. A cadence back on B-flat major calms the work at m. 17 and illustrates the meaning of the rhythmically less active word “quiet.” The musical phrase from mm. 14-17 is then reset, but this time the variation cadences on the third of B-flat major, D minor, at m. 21. Conte uses the basic harmonic and melodic material of mm. 14 and 15 one last time in a richly expanded setting for the text “and though the Muse’s will deny it.” This phrase, which is filled

with borrowings from B-flat minor, ends once again on D minor at m. 25.

The final phrase of stanza one begins at m. 26. Here one can see a greater rhythmic energy and a faster harmonic rhythm in the music. The soprano line acts in a more independent manner than the other three parts, thereby eliding all the parts together. Moving simultaneously, the lower three parts create repeating patterns of chordal planing at mm. 27 and 29. This section starts calmly and then grows in intensity as it progresses through a series of major chords to a climax on the text “loud and clear” at m. 31, where it cadences not on the D minor of the previous phrase, but rather D major.

Conte then has a brief return at m. 31 of the introductory material of mm. 1-13. As one would expect of Conte this is not an exact recapitulation but a revoicing with the sopranos *divissi* to highlight the word “music.” Beginning at m. 38 the material of mm. 8-13 is raised a whole step to C major. Here again one can see the use of the cadence on the mediant of the scale in the repeated statement of “music” at mm. 38, 40, and 42. The statement in m. 42 is an augmented version that serves as a modulation to A major. As is common in Conte’s writing, this modulation is to a form of a third relation of the previous key.

The shift to A major (m. 46) marks the beginning of the second stanza. Here again Conte uses a solo and accompaniment texture. After a two-bar introduction of “ahs” and

humming in the lower voices, the soprano enters with the text. The choir then has four bars in which all the parts are basically equal. Throughout this opening portion of stanza two the listener wants to hear a stable A major chord, but Conte keeps putting it off, possibly to illustrate the “world’s waiting” of the text. Not until m. 52 is there an A major chord on a downbeat. At this point the voices switch roles and the basses take the text of the poem’s third line while the sopranos join the others on textless vowels. Throughout this section the textless phrases move in two-bar units as they support the texted voices. At m. 56 the tonality shifts once again, this time to A dorian. Line four of stanza two begins gently at m. 60 on an A minor chord with the entire choir singing text. This gives mm. 56-63 the same structure as mm. 48-55. The only change is that this later statement has an extended climax for the word “on” of “carry on” (mm. 63-66). This is Conte’s way of showing the ongoing nature of the stars in the text.

Conte now writes a repeating cadencial idea from mm. 67-81. There is a momentary pull between the chords A major and C major, which then resolves to the work’s opening E-flat major on the word “music.” Note again the tertian relationships. This harmonic motion gives the text a strong sense of flow pulling it to the last phrase of the poem. Throughout this section there is parallel motion in three of the voices, creating a sense of planing which is used to illustrate the word “music.” This can be seen in the

motion of the altos, tenors, and basses in mm. 67-69 and then in all the voices at m. 75.

With the deceptive cadence on C major at m. 82, the last line of text begins. The imitative writing of the previous phrase is replaced with homophonic writing to show the text being “married,” or brought together, with “the tones.”

FIGURE 4.24, *THE COMPOSER* MM. 79-84

79 *mp* *rall.* *mp* *Slower, reverent* ♩ = 60

his mu - sic, mar - ried to the tones that he must

p *mp*

mu - sic, mar - ried to the tones that he must

p *mp*

mu - sic, mar - ried to the tones that he must

p *mp*

mar - ried to the tones that he must

Slower, reverent ♩ = 60

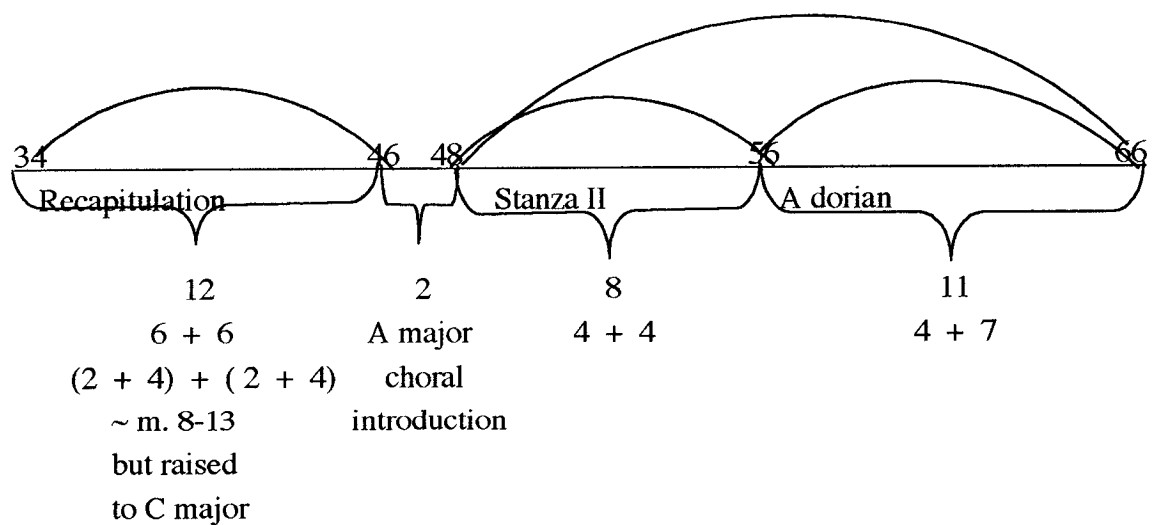
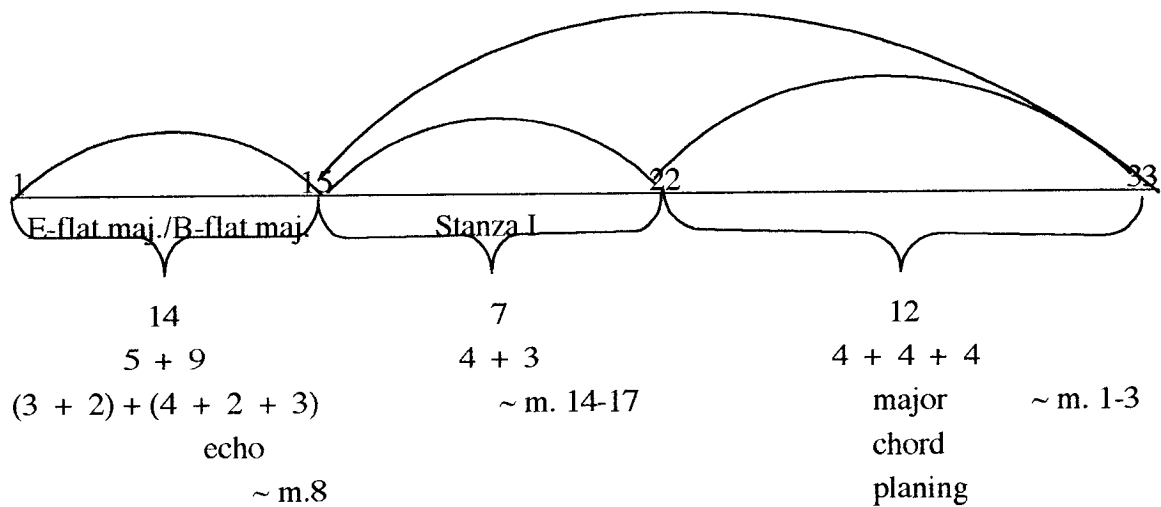
rall.

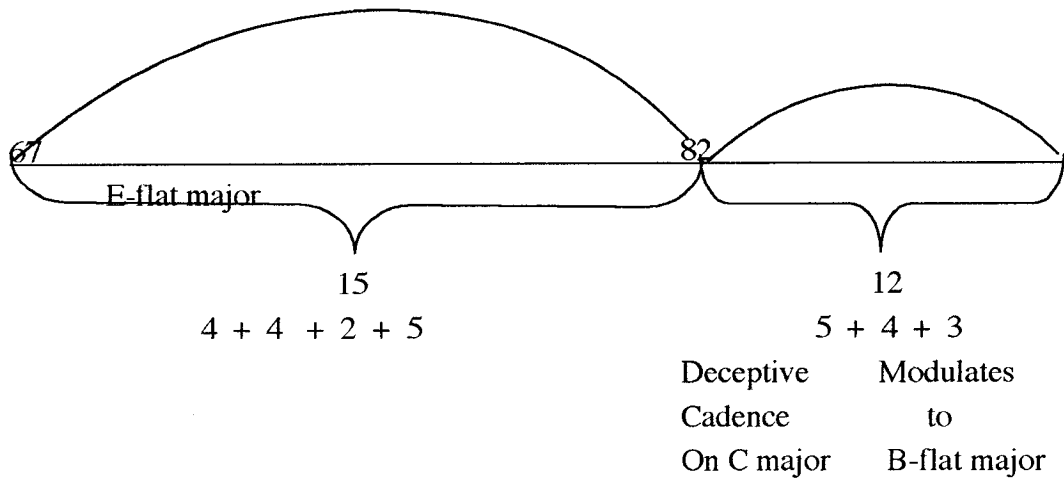
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This writing is reminiscent of that in m. 15. There is an extremely rapid harmonic rhythm for these three bars as C major leads to E-flat major, which is then destabilized by A minor, G-flat major, and finally E-flat major again before the arrival in the home key

of B-flat major at m. 85. In these final repetitions of text in m. 87, Conte once again moves from the I chord to the iii chord to give a feeling of sensitivity to the setting of the poetry. It is not until the last three bars that the piece remains on the tonic chord, thus giving the piece a sense of finality. In the frequent return of the opening material Conte creates a loose rondo form for this work.

CHART 4.8, THE COMPOSER





“O Sun” from *September Sun*

“O Sun” is the second movement of Conte’s most recent secular SATB choral work *September Sun*. St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in New York City commissioned this piece in 2002. The full work consists of four movements scored for orchestra and choir. William Trafka, the church’s Director of Music, conducted the premier on September 15, 2002 as a first year memorial service of those who lost their lives in the attacks of September 11, 2001. John Stirling Walker’s poetry depicts the sun as silent witness to the events that unfolded that bright and cloudless day. Walker has collaborated with Conte for several works, *The Composer*, *Elegy for Matthew*, and Conte’s most recent project his musical *The Passion of Rita St. James*. The poetry that is used for “O Sun” was not the original poetry submitted. The first text was submitted two days after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 and in the heat of the moment was more political than memorial in tone. It was decided that some time needed to pass before a clear evaluation of a project of this nature could take place. Walker later submitted a second poem which was accepted as the text for this work. Conte had originally envisioned an *a cappella* work for the memorial, but since it was to be paired with the Duruflé *Requiem*, it was decided that a string orchestra would be involved.

This work starts in much the same way as *The Composer*, which is from the same

period. The opening tonality is C major. Beginning with the bass's unison "g" the men enter a major second apart followed by the women also a major second apart but separated from the men by a minor third. One can easily hear a musical portrayal of the rising sun in these staggered ascending entrances.

FIGURE 4.25, "O SUN" MM. 1-3

The musical score for "O SUN" (Measures 1-3) is presented in a five-staff format. The top four staves are for the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The bottom staff is for the Keyboard, marked "(for rehearsal only)". The music is in 4/4 time, marked "Andante tranquillo" with a tempo of quarter note = 72. The key signature is C major. The vocal parts enter in a staggered, ascending fashion. The bass part begins with a unison G. The tenor and alto parts enter a major second above the bass, and the soprano part enters a major second above the alto. The lyrics "Sun," are written below the vocal lines. The keyboard part provides accompaniment for the vocal lines.

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There is then a second statement of the rising sun (m. 4) but this time the sopranos enter on the third of the key. Following this second statement, the voices go into two-note motives and the rhythmic pace increases. The exclamation "O" is also added as a quarter note pick-up to the main word "sun." At this point A minor challenges C major but it is

C major, the tonal symbol for the sun, that finally triumphs (m. 9). In the third C major statement of this grouping the voicing is changed to a darker, lower feel at m.13 in a musical foreshadowing. After this introductory section the main poetic portion begins at m.15 in the basses. This is also similar to Conte's *The Composer*, which finished its introductory material after fourteen measures. In contrast to *The Composer*, however, this section of "O Sun" is very imitative, whereas *The Composer* is more homophonic. This three-and-a-half bar phrase (m. 15) starts on the same "g" as the bass's opening and then introduces a mixolydian inflection with the "b-flat." The other voices enter in stretto creating imitative energy for the text "Grace, ceaseless and abounding" which increases in intensity and volume. By m.19 C major is destabilized and the voices begin a modulation to A minor. In the movement to the cadence there is movement by parallel fourths between the voices that gives a slight Renaissance sound to the work. This can be seen at m. 20 and again at m. 21.

Line two of the poetry begins in m. 23 with a homophonic shift to A minor. The return to the *piano* dynamic marking, combined with the use of the minor key, creates a darker mood for the text "overwhelms us."

FIGURE 4.26, "O SUN" MM. 21-24

The image displays a musical score for the piece "O SUN" from measures 21 to 24. It features four staves: three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor) and one piano accompaniment staff. The music is in 4/4 time and the key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal parts begin at measure 21 with the lyrics "bound - ing, O - ver - whelms us;". The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) for the first part of each line and *p* (piano) for the second part. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support, with a prominent bass line and chordal textures.

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This idea is then repeated slightly higher at m. 25. Line three "descend by way of Death" starts at m. 26 with a descent from A minor through a brief pull to G minor before a strong arrival on an A minor chord (the mediant of F major) on the word "Death." The tenor and alto move to octave "f's" in m. 29 firmly establishing the F major sonority. The altos then portray the text with their descending echo phrase to the word "death" at m. 30. There is a final statement of "death" from the men who again go from an A minor to an F major chord over a pedal "a" at m. 31. Conte finishes this line of poetry "sweet tragic death" at m. 32 with the return to C major. The return to major at this point portrays the

text with a “sweeter” brighter quality. This phrase is in two two-bar units with the second unit having a descending bass line down to the tonic “c.” The next line of text begins at m. 36 with the soprano’s phrase, and is quickly imitated by the tenors in an overlapping idea. Here the tonality shifts to D-flat major with an increase in rhythmic energy. The phrase surges to a climax on the downbeat of m. 38 with the word “sun.” Conte gives this cadence a rich sonority using the pitches “a-flat,” “b-flat,” “g-flat,” and “f” in a wide voicing. Throughout this statement of “the rising sun” Conte uses word painting in the ascending vocal line for “rising”. He also gives the word an increased energy with the bass’s dotted eighth and sixteenth rhythmic statement at m. 39. This is followed by a brief modulatory section at m. 41 where the choir creates similar phrases that roll out like waves to show the “warmth” and “rays” rolling over us. These two short phrases cadence on E major tonalities, but in the second (m. 42) the altos pull the harmony with a shift to an A minor chord setting up a plagal cadence. This propels the music to the E minor tonality of the next section.

Line seven of the poetry starts at m. 43 with a much quieter, somber feel than the preceding line. There is a sense of calm as the voices are set homophonically in E minor. This resembles both rhythmically and harmonically the earlier shift to minor at m. 23. At both these points the new subdued sections follow a rhythmic build to a climax. This

calm after the storm gives even greater dramatic focus to the statements. At m. 43 the poetry speaks of the “lives, that morning.” After a *tutti* choral statement the men restate this text in overlapping imitation using a variation on the original rhythm. It is as if individuals in disbelief think of all the things that might have been had this tragedy not occurred and of all the people who could have pursued their goals. At m. 45 the tessitura is lower, not only due to the absence of women’s voices, but because the basses are now harmonized a sixth below their initial statement. The line then continues at m. 47 in C major as it speaks of the expectation these lives had. Conte once again uses a modulation by third to brighten the mood as the text speaks of the “expectation” that was part of the victim’s lives. With this brighter thought Conte adds the women’s brighter vocal color, still using the basic rhythmic idea of m. 43, and an imitative echo is begun between the women and the men. Conte continues this alternation between the women and men but adds ascending scale writing within the original thematic motive. This ascending scale passage, which begins at m. 51, has an increase in chromatic writing based on C dorian. The chromaticism combined with the rhythmic and dynamic increase creates a mounting intensity, as well as a faster harmonic rhythm. Throughout this rush to the cadence beginning at m. 51 the men remain somewhat independent of the women. This imitative passing of the theme could be seen as the many people lost in the tragedy

as they raced about to complete the goals of their lives. It is not until the final repetition of the text at m. 53 that all the voices join together. The voices begin to close this section at m. 54 with their arrival on a strong C major thirteenth chord, where all but the altos are singing *divissi*. This is then rounded out with a restatement of the “O Sun” text from the opening, which now uses the material of m. 54 as its basis.

The next line of text (m. 60) resembles the short homophonic statement that was used in mm. 23 and 43. Conte alters this version with parallel octaves in the *divissi* bass and alto that ascend and create a growing intensity through their dissonance with the octave “c’s” in the other voices. It is in this use of parallel octaves that one can see the influence of Stravinsky, especially the *Pater Noster*. This idea is duplicated at m. 62 in the four-part men’s voices which then expand lower to a six-part split. In both statements the irony of the word “life” is emphasized through the use of C minor.

As in earlier instances, this homophonic statement is followed by vocal imitation as the choir passes the text of stanza three from one voice to the next. This section begins at m. 64 with the calm alto entrance that sets the simple mood of “innocent lives.” The phrase is colored by dorian inflections until m. 67 to underscore that lives were taken. At this point a modulation to A minor occurs. The text “innocent lives it took” is strengthened with the sudden use of D major for the close of the phrase at m. 69. The

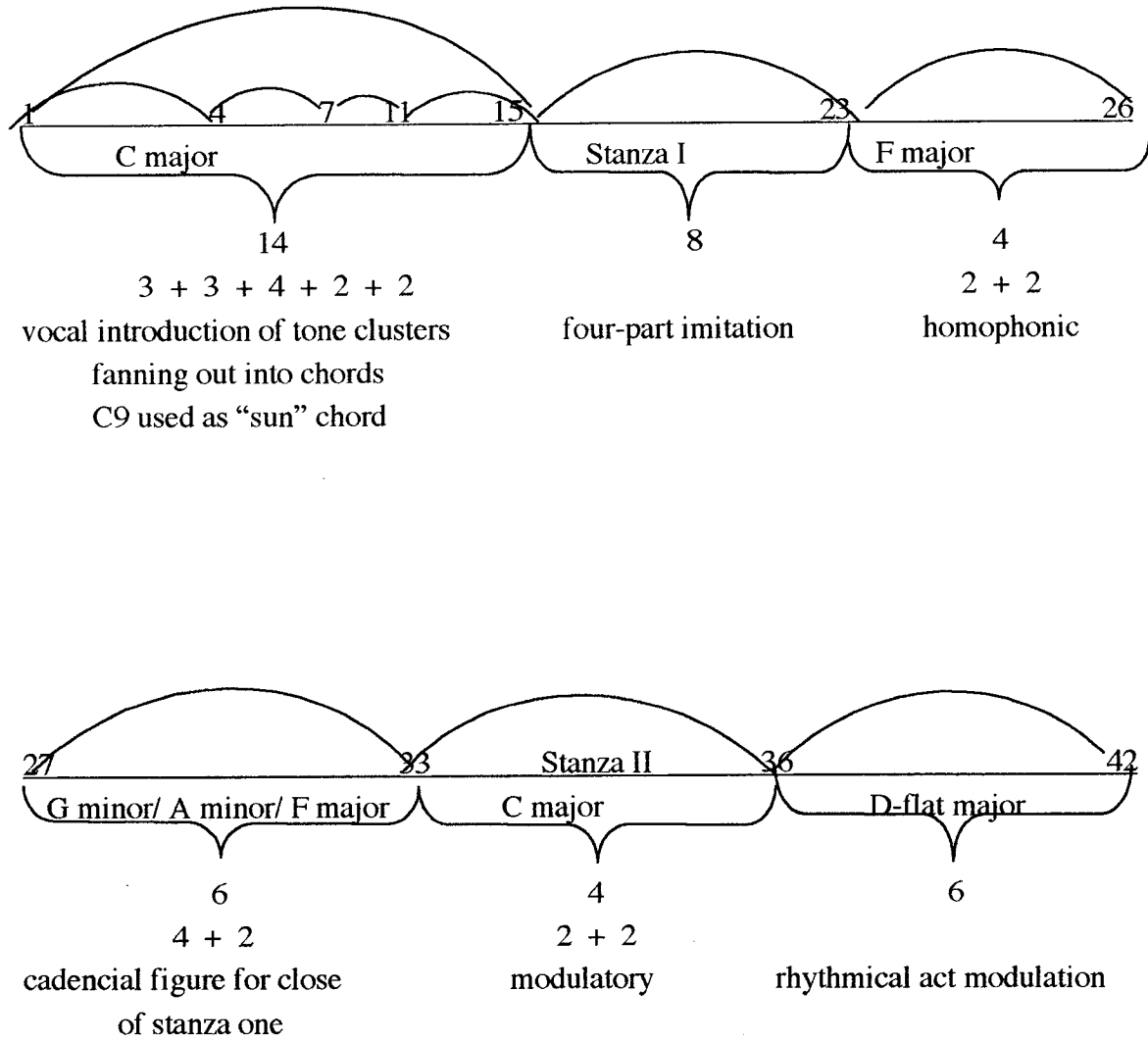
A minor tonality reasserts itself as the choir, in a homophonic declamation, solemnly admits that some who were not innocent were probably among those lost.

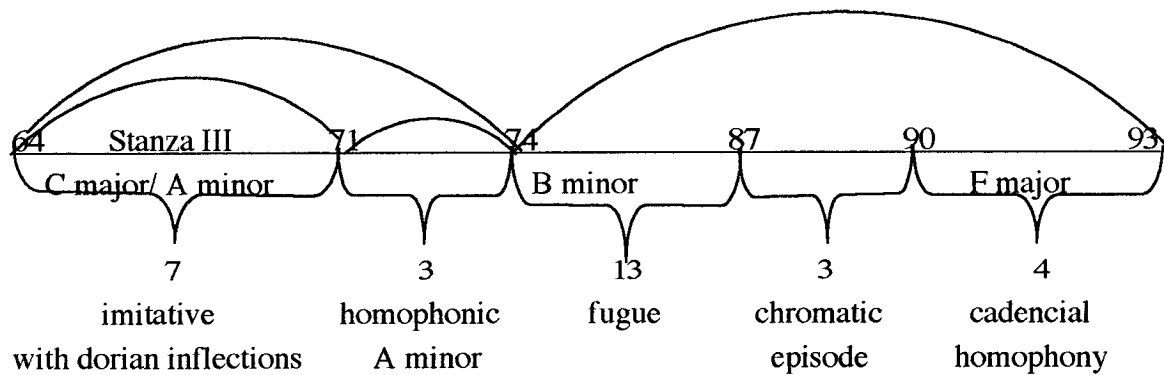
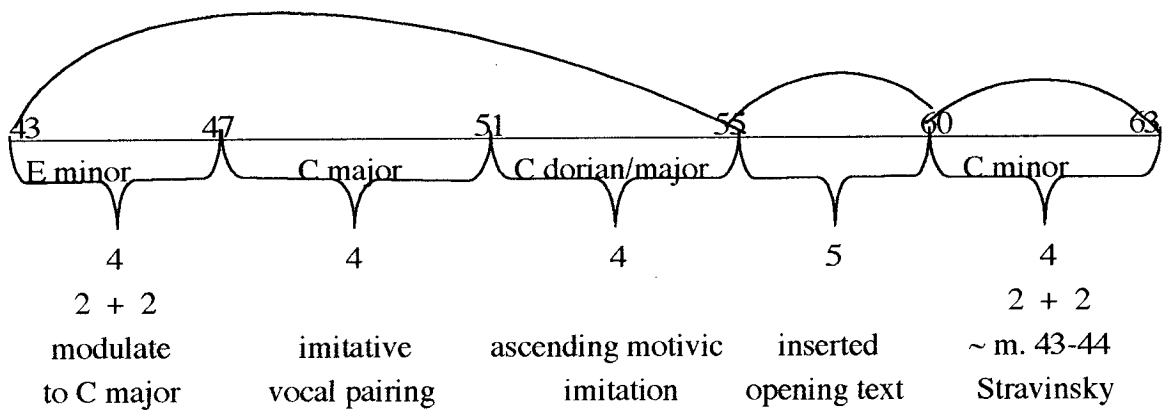
The choir then pauses on octave “b’s” for the word “yet” as though contemplating its next thought before expressing it. This is similar to m. 90 of *In Praise of Music* where the voices sustain the word “yet” before telling how music freed them of their cares. In “O Sun” the singers sustain the thought of what they had said before continuing with the idea that God’s love, like the sun on that day, shines on everyone. This section, which begins at m. 74, is in B minor and is the first example of a strict fugue in Conte’s choral writing. The opening motive uses a melodic shape similar to that found in m. 64. Both of these phrases express the positive essence of innocence and God’s love rather than the negative aspect of what has happened. It is interesting to note that the idea of God (m. 74) and Grace (m. 15) both use highly energized fugal writing, thus making a connection between the thoughts. Consistently within this work the positive ideas are alive with imitation and tend to have a flowing arch form, while the darker ideas tend to be set in more subdued homophonic phrases with less melodic arch. The obvious exception to this occurs at m. 64 with the imitative statement about the lives that were taken. This thought seems to call for a stronger outcry that cannot be met in the hushed homophonic idea. In the fugue section, the bass’s subject is answered by the tenors a fourth up rather than the

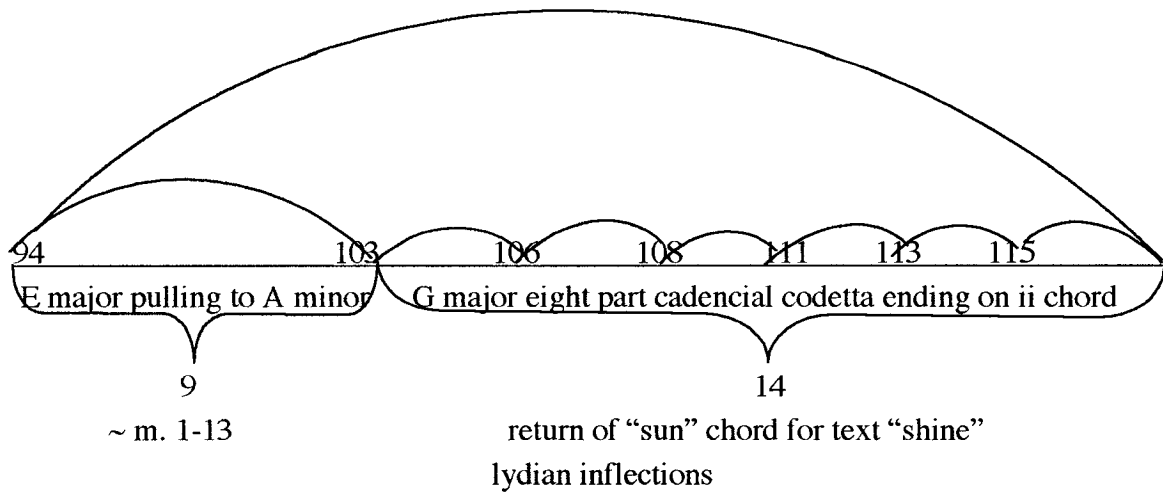
customary fifth. The altos then declaim the subject while the sopranos supply the answer. Each entrance occurs at regular time intervals three measures after the previous part. This section is highly chromatic and swirls forward with an extremely fast harmonic rhythm. The fugue builds in intensity with a repetition of the text “on good and bad” at mm. 86, 87, and finally 89. Each repetition modulates further away from B minor. One can hear the intense emotions subside as sharps give way to flats and the section moves toward a cadence at m. 90 on F major, which then concludes on a “b” and “f-sharp” diad at m. 93. This B tonality prepares the modulation to E major at m. 94.

Here Conte inserts a recapitulation of the opening as part of a cadencial codetta. By m. 101 the repeated text moves to A minor. This in turn sets up the modulation to C major with the fourteenth and final line of text beginning at m.102. Throughout this closing section there are leaps to or from “f-sharp” which bring the work to a close in G major.

CHART 4.9, "O SUN" FROM SEPTEMBER SUN







CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION OF DIFFICULTY OF WORKS

All of Conte's works offer their own special challenges, and should not be undertaken lightly. The first piece in this study, *The Waking*, was written for a high school level choir. It is important to remember, however, that this choir was accustomed to performing difficult music with a high level of sophistication and polish. Overall the choral writing is homophonic without difficult rhythmic patterns. The accompaniment, though created with a minimalist focus, does support the choir. It follows the harmonic progression of the choir and at times includes melodic doublings of the voices. The vocal parts make use of thematic repetition that will help reduce the time needed to learn the work. The intervallic make-up of *The Waking* uses primarily stepwise motion with relatively few wide intervals. Even the wider intervals tend to stay within a fourth or a fifth and are most often in the key. The use of modal inflections usually occurs through stepwise motion rather than steps to non-harmonic tones. Possibly the most difficult aspect of this work is accurate entrances in the new tonalities, although these are generally established by the piano ahead of time. As far as the vocal considerations of this work, Conte has set each voice part in a moderate range with no harsh demands on any part. The text is set in a natural manner following the normal accentuation so the

vocal line flows easily. There are points of close dissonance such as at m. 55 in the tenors and basses that will need to be rehearsed. There are also points where lower voices cross above upper parts such as the altos and sopranos at m. 99. This piece should not be viewed as strictly high school level. The poetic text-setting and dynamic shading would also offer a college or community choir the opportunity for true artistic expression.

Invocation and Dance is a challenging work that functions at various levels. It can be done in its original two-movement setting, or the movements can be done separately. There is also the option of full orchestra or piano and percussion. Both versions work well, but for the ensemble that is on a modest budget the piano four hands and percussion brings a wonderful timber to a program. The first movement is the more easily accessible with its lyric lines and limited rhythmic challenges. Rhythmic activity is generally limited to the accompaniment that supports the voices harmonically rather than through vocal doublings. After the opening statement, most of the vocal writing is stepwise with only a few entrances that call for modal inflections. There are some close harmonic *divissi* sections that require special attention particularly in regards to tuning issues. The vocal range, though not extreme, would need to be checked for both the basses and sopranos. If performing this with a high school level choir, keep in mind the basses need a solid low “g” and the sopranos a comfortable high “a,” neither of which are too much of a stretch

for most choirs. The area that will demand the most attention is the dynamic shaping. Throughout the movement there are subtle dynamic contrasts which bring this movement to life and therefore must be addressed in rehearsal.

The second movement, "Dance," makes tremendous use of shifting meters and calls for two strong mallet players as well as the two pianists. This movement would be an outstanding addition to an all-state high school festival or a college concert. It is extremely energized and offers a challenge for the entire ensemble. From the beginning of rehearsals great attention should be given to the rhythmic setting of the text. Conte points out that choirs tend to slow at places such as mm. 28 and 29 where the eighth rest is written in. He suggests putting the end of the previous word on the rest to avoid any slowing down.⁵⁶ Although the choir generally moves homophonically, the mixed meter and the syncopated accentuations must be taken into consideration. The issue of accented syncopation is also ever-present in the instrumental parts. Measures 56 and 57 have shifting accentuations that will need to be presented clearly in the conductor's pattern. The choir must also be able to work independently of the other parts since this is a true ensemble work. There are many points of close harmonic writing that call for exact tuning such as the whole steps found in both the women's and men's parts at m. 37. In

⁵⁶ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

addition to the placement of accents, all parts need to be aware of the dynamic changes since they occur quickly and go from extremes. The vocal writing at m. 122 should be pointed out to a high school level choir in that there is a cross-relation between the tenors of this measure and the basses in the next. It is also in this measure that the altos go above the sopranos. Though these are not serious issues, one might touch on them to make these notes happen cleanly. The return of the A section at m. 162 should be a point of focus since there are clearly independent ostinato parts between the various vocal lines and the instruments. Vocal ranges include low “f-sharps” in the basses and “b’s” in the sopranos in addition to *divissi* vocal parts, so careful consideration must be given to section splits to cover these ranges. As a final word of caution, the bass line has *fortissimo* high “e’s,” which might call for some culturing, especially in younger and older choirs.

Charm Me Asleep is a very challenging piece that, for best results, should only be performed by the college or professional level choir. The extended tertian harmonies combined with extreme use of modal inflections make the reading and tuning of this work a major issue. There are highly chromatic sections that demand each vocal part be independent since there is no support from piano doublings. There are also frequent modulations that need to be emphasized so transitions can happen in a calm manner. The

choir should be made aware of the cross-relations such as those in m. 15 since these are part of the expressive language used in setting the text and as such need to be delivered clearly. Rhythmically the shifting meter fits the text so well that it should not present too much difficulty, but there are points where the clarity of rhythm will take some extra attention. Measures 38 and 42 are two such points. The triplet figure must be kept exact so it does not become the same as the groupings of three eighth notes that follow them. If conducted clearly the rhythmic integrity of these measures should remain intact. A point that will need attention occurs at m. 76, where the tenor part moves in duple groupings of the eighth note against the triple grouping of the other parts. Regardless of these considerations, this is still an exceptional work that should be programmed more often.

In Praise of Music is a five-section cantata in which each section is *attacca* into the next. One can do the inner three sections as a separate work, as in the original SAA version, but the addition of the Thomas Carew sections rounds out the composition and gives it a nice poetic flow. “Celia Singing,” the fifth movement, probably best lends itself to being excerpted for performance on its own. The five sections alternate homophonic and contrapuntal passages with excellent attention to the prosody of the poetry. Throughout the work the piano acts independently of the voices but does offer harmonic

support. One will want to make sure the voices maintain their own rhythmic identity and do not allow themselves to adjust their parts to match the piano as at m. 28 where the choir's final eighth note comes after the piano's triplet quarter note. The singers also need to keep an exact crisp rhythm at m. 87 where the voice's rhythmic line is a contrast to the flowing piano part. In the fourth section a clear *senza vibrato* sound must be maintained throughout the murmuring tone clusters. If too much vibrato is used the effect will be compromised. These sections need to be precisely tuned and *piano*. In the final section (m. 266) special attention should be given to the warmth of the tone. A roundness of the vowels is needed to give this final chorale a rich depth of sound within the wide dynamic range. As with all of Conte's works, the singers must be aware of the modal and chromatic inflections; they happen quickly and vary from part to part, so all voices need to be aware of their harmonic direction. The vocal ranges of the work keep all parts in a comfortable tessitura with the sopranos ascending only briefly to high "b-flat." The basses go down to a low "g" but the tessitura remains between "c" and "c'." This composition works well for the college and community choir level performer and is very successful in its piano format.

Candles in the Wilderness is an intentionally simple setting and would work well in a concert with a community theme. The harmony and rhythms are very accessible

making it useful for choirs at the high school level or higher. There is a limited use of disjunct writing, but these leaps should not pose a problem for most choirs. The piece has a moderate vocal range from a bass low “g-flat” to a soprano high “a-flat.”

Elegy for Matthew is a work that should only be attempted by a choir at the college level or above. The drama involved in this piece calls for mature voices that can deliver rich full *fortissimos* and hushed sustained *pianissimos*. While the rhythmic make-up is not difficult, it needs to be performed with precision. The angular nature of the opening choral statement and the battle calls at m. 32 give the work much of its power. If the rhythm is relaxed, it drains the statement of much of its energy. The dynamic changes found throughout the composition are also crucial in the overall make-up of this piece and must be given adequate attention. This work requires the choir to function independently of the piano since the keyboard is not merely an accompaniment figure, but an integral part of the drama. The vocal writing has all parts moving throughout their range with several instances of octave leaps that will offer singers the chance for dramatic expression. In the second half of the first movement there is a faster harmonic rhythm, but most of the vocal writing is stepwise so this should not pose extreme problems in either reading or tuning.

The second movement of *Elegy for Matthew* opens in a much more lyrical style,

giving the choir an opportunity for sustained soloistic singing. A warm and open quality is necessary to provide the right tone color. This is especially true for the larger leaps that comprise the melodic idea. There are many points of imitation in the choral writing so the singers need to be aware when they are the predominant vocal line and when they need to let another voice come through the texture. The singers also need to be sensitive to balance the duets between voice parts. Throughout this movement the writing is more disjunct than is usually found in Conte's writing. This is done to emphasize the dramatic aspect of the work. Because of this the vocal parts must be confident of their intervals to insure accurate tuning. In the final section of the work the choral writing becomes more sustained and dynamically subdued. Great attention must be paid to the breath support of the singers to create a focused legato line. The accompaniment in this movement is harmonically supportive yet independent of the voices. As noted earlier, the voices must be confident of their parts and not rely on doubling from the keyboard.

The Composer's first challenge is that it is a *cappella*. The harmonic rhythm is fairly fast in the sections of non-sustained imitation. In these imitative portions (e.g. mm. 26 and 53) Conte uses extended tertian harmonies that will challenge the choir. This does not mean, however, that a high school group should not program the work. The imitative writing is moderate and should not cause any rhythmic or reading difficulties. Vocal

ranges are comfortable for high school age voices, and the writing is such that it fits the voice well. The text is very thoughtfully set without any awkward accentuation or placement in the vocal range, and the writing is flowing and primarily conjunct in nature adding to its accessibility. In addition to generic concert programs, this piece would work well as part of an arts fair celebration or an event honoring music or a specific musician.

The writing style of “*O Sun*” is very similar in nature to that of *The Composer* and as such offers many of the same points of focus. There is sustained *a cappella* writing throughout that calls for good breath control to allow a forward intensity of the phrase. The choir must also have the vocal and aural sophistication to maintain its sense of pitch throughout the modulations that are present in the piece. This is especially true if one is doing the entire work. Since the following third movement begins with strings, the choir must keep its sense of intonation for these movements to line up harmonically. There are also homophonic blocks of sound that call for changes in vocal color from section to section within the work. Conte’s imitative writing in this piece tends to have the choir build momentum toward the climax through an increase of harmonic rhythm. These sections (e.g. m. 51) call for an added alertness on the part of the choir. The singers must listen not only to their section but also to the other parts to ensure tonal accuracy. At m. 74 Conte inserts a brief fugue. Here the choir must be aware of who has the subject so

it can be heard clearly as it moves through the voice parts. This section will also require a bit more rehearsal time due to the modulation. Throughout the work there is disjunct writing with wide leaps in all parts. This is especially true in the closing figures of the soprano line. These leaps must have an open, free sound to them, and so the director must be careful when dividing the choir in the eight-part coda. It is very possible to excerpt this movement for length considerations or if a full orchestra is not available. This is truly a composition that merits performance not only because of its subject matter, a tribute to the lives taken in the September 11 attacks, but also on its musical merit.

As an additional tool in evaluating the four representative works that were rehearsed and performed as part of the Lecture-Recital component of this project, a survey was submitted to the twenty-six members of the Recital Choir of the University of Arizona. This choir worked on *The Waking*, *Charm Me Asleep*, “Dance” from *Invocation and Dance* and “O Sun” from *September Sun*. They had seven rehearsals consisting of fifty minutes each to learn and fine-tune these pieces before their performance. The choir is made-up of a high percentage of choral conducting graduate students, plus a few undergrads to round out the sections. The singers were asked to evaluate the works after their fifth rehearsal using these five categories : 1. Rhythmic Writing, 2. Harmonic Language, 3. Vocal Writing (does it fit the voice?), 4. Melodic Contour (Intervallic

Writing), and 5. The manner in which the text is set. The choir members based their evaluations on each composition's level of difficulty ranging from very difficult to not at all difficult. All of these categories are subjective, but the results gave me some insight as to what the final rehearsals needed to address. The choir members were also asked to give any overall impressions they had about the four pieces. Several singers left some of the questions blank so the total responses change from item to item. The results were as follows:

TABLE 5.1, LECTURE CHOIR SURVEY

	Very Difficult	Moderate	Slight	Not Difficult
<i>The Waking</i>				
Rhythm	1	8	7	4
Harmony	2	8	8	2
Vocal	3	3	6	8
Intervalic	2	5	8	4
Text Setting	1	3	8	8
<i>Charm Me Asleep</i>				
Rhythm	3	8	7	3
Harmony	7	10	3	1
Vocal	3	5	7	5
Intervalic	4	8	8	1
Text Setting	0	4	8	7

	Very Difficult	Moderate	Slight	Not Difficult
“O Sun”				
Rhythm	0	1	8	12
Harmony	0	6	9	6
Vocal	1	3	5	12
Intervalic	0	5	7	8
Text Setting	0	7	1	11

“Dance”				
Rhythm	13	6	1	0
Harmony	2	10	8	1
Vocal	2	8	8	1
Intervalic	2	9	9	0
Text Setting	3	8	6	0

The categories that received the highest number of responses have been bold-faced to make the evaluation of the data more easily accessible. As one can see, the evaluated criteria for *The Waking* were perceived by most of the choir to fall in the range of a lower level of difficulty. The choir cited the rhythmic and harmonic make-up of the composition as being the most challenging musical element of the work. However, these categories received only a moderate level of difficulty from the choir. This work also received a very positive overall review from the singers with most commenting on its beauty.

Charm Me Asleep had results that placed the difficulty of the work at the

moderate level. There were a high number of responses that noted the harmonic language as being a category of extra (or moderate) difficulty. This coincides with my evaluation of the work and should be given special focus in the rehearsal schedule. Several chorus members noted that some of the harmonic language and intervallic writing was challenging, but the overall impression was extremely favorable. They accurately point out that this work has a tremendous variety of subtle nuances that combine to create a beautiful and rewarding composition.

“O Sun” was viewed strongly by the choir as a very accessible piece with a low level of difficulty. The majority of the singers found this work harmonically lush and emotionally very moving. Both the message of the text and the sensitivity with which it is set appealed greatly to the ensemble.

“Dance” received very strong reactions from the choir with most citing it as a rhythmically difficult work. The time in the rehearsal process needed to address the rhythm in this work, I believe, caused the other evaluated categories to also score in the moderately high level of difficulty range. This work must be rehearsed slowly so that a strong rhythmic foundation can be established into which the other musical elements can be integrated. Since rehearsal time was at a premium for this project, not as much focus could be given to this work as would be ideally recommended. As a result the overall

reviews of this work varied greatly. There were those who found the rhythmical writing overly complicated and wondered if a rebarring of the work would be practical. As such they found the piece unrewarding. There were also those that found the rhythmic drive challenging and exciting, citing this as their favorite of the four pieces presented. As I have stated earlier, this is indeed a rhythmically challenging yet rewarding work, and as such must be given time to develop during the rehearsal process.

CHAPTER SIX

SURVEYS

As an additional portion of this study a survey was distributed to get a sense of how widely known Conte's works are in the United States, and how the choral community is receiving them. A questionnaire was e-mailed to colleges, universities, and performing organizations throughout the country. This same survey was also posted on the American Choral Directors Association's e-mail so that a greater variety of choral organizations could be reached. The survey consisted of the following four questions:

1. Have you ever programmed a choral work by David Conte, and if so which one and how often was it performed?
2. Have you or your choirs ever recorded a choral work of David Conte, and if so which and under which CD title and recording company?
3. What was it that drew you to the choral work of David Conte?
4. Can you comment on the choir's impression of the work?

Of the original one hundred fifteen surveys e-mailed, seventy-four people responded (sixty-four percent), with an additional twenty-two responses from people replying to the survey posted on the ACDA *Choralnet* bringing the total number of responses to ninety-six. Forty-eight (or fifty percent) of the total responses were from directors that had done works of Conte. Of this group, sixteen (thirty-three percent or sixteen point six percent of the total responses) had performed works that fit within the study group of Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-orchestral Complement.

Question two was included to see to what extent choirs were considering Conte's works as a representative standard of their own choral ability. By examining an organization's public CD releases, one acquires an understanding of how a group views itself through the level and type of music it performs and preserves. Though many groups had the usual in-house performance recording of their works, only three of the responding choirs mentioned commercially marketed CD's that contained some of Conte's compositions. One group that has recorded Conte's pieces is Chanticleer. They have recorded both his *Ave Maria (With a Poet's Eye)* — Chanticleer Records label CR-8804) and *Charm Me Asleep (Out of this World with Chanticleer)*—Teldec label 4509-96515-2). *Charm Me Asleep* has also been recorded by Leo Nestor with the American Repertory Singers on the Arsis CD *Love Songs*. In addition Nestor has recorded *Ave Maria* for the

Gothic label with the Choir of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D. C. The Washington Men's Camerata recorded *A Stable-lamp is Lighted* which appears on the Gothic label #G49128. Jerry Blackstone has recorded the *Carmina Juventutis* and *Invocation and Dance* with the University of Michigan's Men's Glee. The *Carmina Juventutis* is also featured on Blackstone's video entitled *Working with Male Voices*. It is this video that several of the responding directors cited as their introduction to the works of Conte. Both Jonathan Reed of Michigan State University and Jo-Michael Scheibe of the University of Miami have mentioned Mark Recordings of their ACDA convention appearances of *Canticle, Invocation and Dance, Ave Maria*, and *Carmina Juventutis*. Anton Armstrong of St. Olaf College has recorded *Cantate Domino* on *A Choral Tapestry*, which appears on the Vanity label, and can be ordered at 1-888-232-6523 through St. Olaf College. The *Electra Women's Chorus* has also recorded the three-movement SSA version of *In Praise of Music* and the SSAA version of *Hosanna* on the Skylark label. The Santa Fe Desert Chorale has recorded a work of Conte's on their CD *Encore*.

In reviewing the data for question number three of the survey, "What was it that drew you to the choral work of David Conte?" twenty-two (forty-six percent) of the respondents replied that the harmonic language and the way in which Conte set the text

drew them to his music. Nineteen (thirty-nine percent) of those who have done works by Conte specifically mention that it is the manner in which he is able to set the text that they find so appealing. They point out the superb sense of text accentuation, which makes the words “singable” with a clear sense of line, as well as his use of word painting.

Twelve (twenty-five percent) of those who had performed works by Conte specifically mentioned the harmonic language as a factor that drew them to his works.

Some of the responses to this question such as, “I was drawn to Conte’s work by hearing it on a video or CD,” or, “he is a friend,” were difficult to categorize.

Consequently these remarks are simply listed on the chart of responses and have not been interpreted as meaningful beyond their basic statement.

Of those who responded to the question about the choir’s impression of Conte’s works, there were thirty-six (seventy-five percent) positive responses. Though at first the choir members found the works difficult, they soon began to love the intricate rhythms and rich harmonic language. The directors also stated that chorus members found the text settings vocally satisfying; they found the choice of text very moving. One choir chose to read the poetry of “The Waking” before each performance.⁵⁷ Frank Albinder, who performed with Chanticleer for many years, wrote that the group always enjoyed singing

⁵⁷ Brady Allred, Survey from Duquesne University, 18 December 2002.

Conte's works and chose to program them often.⁵⁸

The responses to this survey came from across the United States and have been grouped by regions. Of the four respondents from the Pacific Northwest region, three (seventy-five percent) had programmed works by Conte. Only one of these works (*Charm Me Asleep*) was from the study group.

From the Western region I received seventeen replies with ten (fifty-five percent) organizations reporting they had performed a Conte composition. Four of these seventeen groups (twenty-three percent) had presented pieces that fit into the scope of this study. *Charm Me Asleep* and *The Waking* had each been performed by two choirs, while *In Praise of Music* and *Elegy for Matthew* had been presented by only one choir each.

The Eastern region had the highest response rate with twenty-two groups replying. Twelve of these choirs (fifty-four percent) had sung a work by Conte of which six (fifty percent) fell within the scope of this study. *Charm Me Asleep* and *Elegy for Matthew* had each been presented by two groups, while *The Waking*, *Invocation and Dance*, *The Composer*, and *September Sun* had each been programmed once.

In the Southwest region five out of seven (seventy-one percent) respondents stated that they had performed a Conte composition. None of these groups sang pieces

⁵⁸ Frank Albinder, e-mail correspondence with author, 11 February 2002.

that were within the parameters of this study. As far as I am aware, this made my April 1, 2003 Lecture-Recital the southwestern premier of the four works I presented.

From the North Central region I received eleven responses of which three (twenty-seven percent) choirs had programmed Conte's works. Like the southwestern region, none of the North Central region responding groups had performed works from the study group.

Fifteen choirs from the Southern region replied, of which six (forty percent) had performed Conte compositions. Two of these six groups (thirty-three percent) had programmed *Invocation and Dance*, the only work to fall into the study group.

There were eighteen replies from Central region choirs, ten of which (fifty-five percent) had sung Conte compositions on their programs. Three of these organizations (thirty-three percent) used works from the study group. Two had presented *Invocation and Dance*, while one had performed *Charm Me Asleep*.

Two of the responses were from international conductors, one from Canada and one from Hong Kong. Neither ensemble had presented a work by Conte.

From the information provided by the nineteen choirs who had presented a work from the study group, *Invocation and Dance* and *Charm Me Asleep* were cited as the most programmed works, each having been performed by five groups (a combined total

of fifty-two percent). *The Waking* and *Elegy for Matthew* were the second most presented study works with three groups (totaling thirty-one percent) singing the compositions in concert. *In Praise of Music*, *The Composer*, and *September Sun* were all cited once (fifteen percent combined) as being performed by those surveyed. The Eastern and Western regions had the highest number of organizations respond that they had presented one or more of Conte's works found in the study group. Forty-two percent of the choirs that had presented study works were from the Eastern region where, incidentally, Conte's publisher is located. The Western region, where Conte currently resides, made up thirty-one percent; the Central region fifteen percent; and the Southern region ten percent of the organizations that had programmed works from the study group.

Compared to Conte's *Ave Maria*, the most frequently mentioned work from outside the study group with fifteen people citing it for performance, the two top works in the study group *Charm Me Asleep* and *Invocation and Dance* were programmed only one-third as often.

In reviewing the results of the surveys from across the country, it became clear that those elements of Conte's works that the composer himself deems the most important are indeed some of the main elements that attract other musicians to his compositions. Conte's belief that the choice of text is the principal factor in creating a

well-crafted work, and his conviction that all aspects of a composition evolve from the text, are apparent in the responses which frequently mentioned the choice of text and the manner of setting the text as noteworthy characteristics of his style. Conductors also noted that Conte sets poetry in a way that allows a natural flow of the text with well-conceived word accentuation.

Conte intentionally uses a harmonic language that adds to the meaning of the poetry by outlining the text's structure through modulations that create a progression mirroring the emotional development of the text. Respondents to the survey also frequently cited Conte's harmonic language as a feature that caused their organizations to program his music.

A third correlation involves singers' impressions of performing the pieces. Conte's claim that he writes for the singer is validated by responses such as "expressive part-writing that is grateful to sing."

Judging from the surveys, there seems to be consistent agreement between the characteristics of Conte's music that he finds integral to his musical voice and those that draw people to perform his works.

CONCLUSION

In this document, I have presented an analytical study of the secular SATB choral works with non-orchestral complement of David Conte. According to Conte, it is the text that inspires his works, and consequently a great deal of this paper deals with the manner in which the poetry is set. Conte often employs word painting to illustrate the text or poetic mood. He also uses the structure of the poetry as a skeletal outline from which to create his compositions. Conte finds poems with rich emotional progressions the most compelling. Just as the poetic speaker proceeds through various emotional levels, so Conte's musical representation of the poetry takes the performer and audience through parallel progressions. When seeking a new text Conte is often drawn to poetry that uses the imperative mood. He feels this mood gives the poetry a heightened intention. In the first stage of the compositional process Conte memorizes the poetic text so that he knows it completely, including its pacing as it moves from one critical point to the next. He feels that everything comes from the words and that if one spends sufficient time learning the text, it will reveal all the musical components necessary for composition including tonality, tempo, form, and texture. Conte is thoroughly aware of the prosody of his text and lets its natural rhythm determine the ever-changing meters found in his compositions. Through results of the survey conducted as part of this study, it has been shown that a

significant number of those conductors performing works of Conte cite his manner of setting text as a major factor in drawing them to his work.

In addition to giving a great deal of attention to the word accentuation and poetic flow, Conte is always conscious of the singer's needs and limitations, and he crafts the vocal line accordingly. Within this focus on the singer's needs Conte strives to provide each vocal line with its own challenging yet rewarding portion of the whole, so that one part is not entirely subservient to another. In Conte's words he is, "writing for the singer...If the singer loves to sing the work, then my job is done."⁵⁹

A second focus of the study is Conte's use of a rich and unique harmonic language to portray the poetry. Conte is a composer who is firmly grounded in tonality, but it is his tonal coloring or "modal inflections" that give energy and harmonic interest to his works. Robert Schuneman, principal owner and president of E. C. Schirmer Music Company in Boston once described Conte's music as being, "a broad assimilation of popular rhythm and nineteenth century Franco-Russian harmony, filtered through twentieth-century modality."⁶⁰ Conte uses these modal and chromatic inflections (brief shifts in tonality) to bring out the meaning of a poetic phrase or to musically underscore a

⁵⁹ Conte, interview, 29 July 2002.

⁶⁰ Conte, telephone conversation, 29 May 2003.

key word or mood. He frequently uses structural modulation (often by thirds or by borrowing from the parallel major and minor) as a method to harmonically represent the poetic structure of a work. In his view this frequent modulation represents abundance, as one key opens into another to create a spilling over of harmonic motion. Conte feels it is this motion by third, both to new tonal centers and as cadences within the key, rather than by fifth that gives an added sensitivity to his work. He draws the comparison to Samuel Barber who also uses this harmonic vocabulary.⁶¹ Again, from both the research and survey responses, it appears that the harmonic language, with its extended tertian harmonies, is a major component of Conte's appeal to conductors.

Like many composers, Conte has been influenced by a wide variety of musical styles and genres. He cites specific elements in his works as being inspired by earlier musicians such as Schumann, Debussy, Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky, Copland, Reich, Sinatra, and Streisand. Ned Rorem speaks of this as a "cross-pollination." In his book *Lies: A Diary 1986-1999* he writes:

Dialects have always, like spores floating in the air, throbbed in the worlds of art awaiting a cross-pollination that will render them into languages. Otherwise put: new wrinkles (once known as innovation) have always been the work of lesser artists taken up uncredited by the Great and made their own. At the moment the situation seems reversed: the innovators—the lesser artists—are already world-famous, while those incorporating their ideas into something more solid are, for the moment, obscure. Not that Philip Glass and Steve Reich are especially original; it's merely that their language was a relief to what had preceded it. But without them the young straightforward composers would be different. Torke in dance,

⁶¹ Conte, interview, 31 December 2002.

Adams in opera, Beaser in song and chamber music, Conte in choral (especially sacred) music. These categories are undergoing revival.⁶²

It is my hope that through this study choral conductors will gain a more thorough understanding of Conte's works, as well as the compositional choices he has made, and that it will provide them with a tool for evaluating the performance level of these study pieces for their future programming.

⁶² Ned Rorem, *Lies: A Diary 1986-1999* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2000), 125.

APPENDIX: E-MAIL SURVEY RESULTS

North West

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Haystack Choral Cond. Inst. sent by Lani Johnson	Rodney Eichenberger	yes	yes	text setting and melodic line
2. Seattle Choral Company	Fred Coleman	yes	no	contemporary harmonies and expressive part-writing
3. Seattle Pacific University	David Anderson	no	n/a	n/a
4. University of Oregon	Sharon Paul	yes	no	excellent sense of text and well crafted, keen sense of word painting

West

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Brigham Young University	Ronald Staheli	yes	yes	setting of text
2. Cal. State Bakersfield	Robert Provencio	no	n/a	n/a
3. Cal. State Fullerton	Gordan Paine	no	n/a	n/a
4. California Lutheran Univ.	Wyant Morton	no	n/a	n/a
5. Chanticleer	Frank Albinder	yes	yes	singable, poetry
6. St. Ignatius Church, San Fran.	Dan Golden	yes	no	local composer
7. San Francisco Lyric Chorus	Helene Whitson	yes	yes	fluid and graceful setting of text, gorgeous piano lines
8. San Francisco State Univ.	Joshua Habermann	yes	no	Conte is a friend
9. San Jose State	Charlene Archebeque	no	n/a	n/a

10. U. of CA – Davis	Jeffrey Thomas	yes	yes	I love his music
11. UCLA	Donald Neuen	no	n/a	n/a
12. U. of CA – Santa Barbara	Michel Marc Gervais	no	n/a	n/a
13. U. of CO – Boulder	Lawrence Kaptein	no	n/a	n/a
14. U of Northern Colorado	Galen Darrough	yes	no	drawn by Blackstone Video
15. USC	William Dehning	yes	no	workshop reading session, and enjoyed the work
16. University of Wyoming	Brian Breeding	yes	yes	dramatic text setting
17. Westmont College	Steven Hodson	no	n/a	n/a

East

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Catholic University of America	Leo Nestor	yes	yes	have the same publisher and Conte is a friend
2. Cambridge Madrigal Singers	Ray Fahrner	no	n/a	n/a
3. Central Bucks County High	Joseph Ohrt	yes	no	Chanticleer Recording
4. Dartmouth	Melinda O'Neal	no	n/a	n/a
5. Duquesne University	Brad Allred	yes	yes	text/ melodic line rhythm interest harmonic motion
6. Hartt College of Music	Edward Bolkovac	yes	no	fit thematic program
7. Indiana Univ. of Penn.	Jim Dearing	yes	no	fit thematic program
8. Ithaca College	Lawrence Doebler	no	n/a	n/a

9. Jubilate Chorale, Inc.	Maxine Asselin	yes	no	wears well
10. Lafayette College	Nina Gilbert	no	n/a	n/a
11. New England Conservatory	Simon Carrington	no	n/a	n/a
12. Peabody Conservatory (for the Walden School)	Leo Wanenchak	yes	yes	text setting and ability to write for various levels of vocal maturity
13. St. Bartholomew's of N.Y.C.	William Trafka	yes	yes	harmonic motion and texts were meaningful to congregation
14. St. Mark's Washington D.C.	Keith Reas	yes	no	difficult yet beautiful
15. University of Maryland	Edward Maclary	no	n/a	n/a
16. Washington Men's Camerata	Frank Albinder	yes	no	expressive text setting, that fits the voice
17. West Chester University	David DeVenney	yes	yes	lush harmony and excellent sense of text setting
18. West Point Chapel	Pat Maimone	no	n/a	n/a
19. Westminster Choir College	Frank Abrahamas	no	n/a	n/a
20. Williams College	Bradlet Wells	no	n/a	n/a
21. Worcester Polytechnic Inst.	John Delorey	no	n/a	n/a
22. Yale	Marguerite Brooks	yes	no	well constructed and grateful to sing

South-West

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Highland High School, AZ	Matthew Tresler	yes	no	harmonies
2. New Mexico State University	Jerry Ann Alt	no	n/a	n/a
3. Northern Arizona University	Edith Copley	yes	no	harmonic writing and interest given each vocal line
4. Texas Lutheran University	Douglas Boyer	yes	no	harmonic palate and text setting
5. University of Mexico	Bradley Ellingboe	no	n/a	n/a
6. University of North Texas	Jerry McCoy	yes	no	referral by colleague
7. University of Texas	James Morrow	yes	no	vocal lines and harmony

North Central

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Bay Port High School	Robbie Doelger	no	n/a	n/a
2. Bemidji State University	Bradley Logan	no	n/a	n/a
3. Concordia College	Rene Clausen	no	n/a	n/a
4. Gustavus College	Greg Aune	no	n/a	n/a
5. Luther College	Sandra Peter	yes	no	n/a
6. Luther College	Weston Noble	no	n/a	n/a
7. North Dakota University	Jo Anne Miller	no	n/a	n/a
8. St. Olaf College	Anton Armstrong	yes	no	taken to style of writing

9. St. Olaf College	Sigrid Johnson	yes	no	well crafted to good choice of text
10. University of Iowa	Timothy Stalter	no	n/a	n/a
11. Wartburg College	Paul Torkelson	no	n/a	n/a

South

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Duke University	Rodney Wynkoop	no	n/a	n/a
2. Florida International Univ.	George Wilkerson	yes	no	performed works as a student and enjoyed
3. Florida State University	Andre Thomas	yes	yes	heard performance
4. Florida State University	Rodney Eichenberger	yes	no	commission
5. Furman University	Bingham Vick Jr.	no	n/a	n/a
6. Louisiana State	Sara Lynn Baird	yes	no	harmonies and treatment of text
7. Murray State	Brad Almquist	no	n/a	n/a
8. Rhodes College	Timothy Sharp	yes	no	American Choral writing
9. Samford University	Milburn Price	no	n/a	n/a
10. Seton Hill University	Marvin Huls	no	n/a	n/a
11. University of Miami	Jo-Michael Scheibe	yes	yes	voice leading and interesting accompaniment
12. Univ. of Tennessee	David Stuzenberger	no	n/a	n/a
13. Virginia Tech	John Howell	no	n/a	n/a
14. Waggener High School	Mary Muse	no	n/a	n/a

15. West Kentucky University	Mitzi Groom	no	n/a	n/a
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Central

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Calvin College	Merl Mustert	yes	no	Blackstone Video
2. Dale Warland Singers	Dale Warland	no	n/a	n/a
3. Indiana University	Jan Harrington	no	n/a	n/a
4. Indiana University	John Poole	no	n/a	n/a
5. Indiana University	Mary Goetze	no	n/a	n/a
6. Michigan State University	Charles Smith	no	n/a	n/a
7. Michigan State University	Jonathan Reed	yes	yes	rich sonorities and sense of vocal color
8. Northwestern Univ.	Robert Harris	yes	no	simply enjoy his writing
9. Northwestern Univ.	Stephen Alltop	no	n/a	n/a
10. Ohio State University	Hilary Apfelstadt	no	n/a	n/a
11. St. Louis Country Day School	Eric Anthony	yes	no	harmonic language and sophisticated text
12. U of Illinois Urbana	Chester Alwes	yes	yes	fit with theme
13. U of Illinois Urbana	Fred Stolfus	no	n/a	n/a
14. University of Michigan	Jerry Blackstone	yes	no	relation of text to music and exciting rhythms
15. University of Tulsa	William McConnell	yes	no	harmonic language attention to stress accent and singable lines

16. West Shore Chorale	John Drotleff	yes	no	friend of composer
17. Wichita State University	Thomas Wine	yes	no	dramatic impact rhythmic energy
18. Wright State University	Hank Dahlman	yes	yes	elegance of setting

International

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Director</u>	<u>Performed</u>	<u>Study Piece</u>	<u>Attraction</u>
1. Hong Kong Bach Choir	Jerome Hoberman	no	n/a	n/a
2. U of Western Ontario	Victoria Meredith	no	n/a	n/a

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