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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

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AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHORAL WORKS OF DAVID CONTE  
UTILIZING ENSEMBLE ACCOMPANIMENT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Arts

Marlen Dee Wilkins

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Music  
Conducting

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This Dissertation by Marlen Dee Wilkins, entitled

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHORAL WORKS OF DAVID CONTE  
UTILIZING ENSEMBLE ACCOMPANIMENT

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Arts in  
College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Music.

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## ABSTRACT

Wilkins, Marlen Dee. *An Analysis of Selected Choral Works of David Conte Utilizing Ensemble Accompaniment*. Published Doctor of Arts dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2011.

Dr. David Conte (b. 1955) is a contemporary composer and one of the last students of the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Conte is one of the more prominent and well-respected American composers of our day, having composed a variety of works for both instruments and voice.

This document covers two of his major works for SATB chorus and accompanimental ensembles consisting of piano four-hands and assorted percussion instruments. The first composition, *American Triptych* is an unpublished work comprised of three movements based on poetry from North American poets, including *i thank You God* (e.e. cummings), *Veni Creator* (Bliss Carman) and *Mariner's Carol* (W.S. Merwin). The second major work was the 2007 ACDA Brock Memorial Commission, entitled *The Nine Muses*.

The first chapter includes the purpose, need, scope and methodology used in the study. The second chapter provides biographical information on David Conte, and includes a review of literature on his works. Chapter Three contains the analysis of the two major works, including discussion on the structure, texture, tonal organization, rhythm, melody and setting of text. Chapter Four provides the summary and conclusions of the study. Author-conducted interviews with David Conte and John Stirling Walker are included as appendices.

## Dedication / Acknowledgements

I dedicate the completion of this work and the culmination of my formal education to my parents, Byron Dean and Helen Wilkins who taught me the love of hard work and blessed me with musical gifts; to Leisel Wilkins, my best friend and eternal companion. She is the epitome of a faithful and loving wife and mother. It is also dedicated to my children Jade Bradley, Jerilynn, Kasiah, Amalia, Charles Haydn, and Clancy Noble. I am indebted to each of them for their encouragement, help, prayers, faith and love.

I gratefully acknowledge the tremendous support and help of my in-laws, Lynn and Joyce Skinner, who have been a strength and example to my family. I also recognize the outstanding faculty and staff at University of Northern Colorado, including my committee, and special thanks to my professors, Dr. Galen Darrough, Dr. Mark Montemayor, Dr. Jill Burleson, Dr. Russel Guyver, Dr. Deborah Kauffman and Dr. Lucyanne Georger—each has played a powerful role for good in my life. A special thanks goes out to Dr. David Lunt, my greatest mentor, who has inspired thousands through his teaching, music, life and love. I also thank Dr. David Conte, without whom this paper would not have been possible. May all who love music be inspired by his work for generations to

come. I am also indebted to E.C. Schirmer Music Company for generously granting permission of material reproduced in this work. I also pay tribute to the poet of *The Nine Muses*, John Stirling Walker, passed from this life in May 2011.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	
I.	INTRODUCTION ..... 1
	Purpose of the Study ..... 1
	Need for the Study ..... 1
	Scope of the Study ..... 4
	Methodology ..... 4
II.	BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..... 6
	Biographical Information ..... 6
	Review of Literature ..... 7
III.	ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITIONS ..... 12
	American Triptych
	i thank You God ..... 12
	Veni Creator ..... 33
	Mariner's Carol ..... 50
	The Nine Muses ..... 69
IV.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ..... 101
	Summary ..... 101
	Conclusions ..... 106
	BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 108
	PREFACE TO APPENDIX MATERIALS ..... 110
	APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE SAN FRANCISCO, CA, JUNE 29, 2010. .... 111

APPENDIX B: PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE OCTOBER 30, 2010 .....	133
APPENDIX C: PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE JANUARY 12, 2011.....	154
APPENDIX D PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE JANUARY 14, 2011.....	171
APPENDIX E PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE FEBRUARY 9, 2011.....	204
APPENDIX F PHONE INTERVIEW WITH JOHN STIRLING WALKER FEBRUARY 11, 2011.....	216



## LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<u>Example</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	<i>i thank You God</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 86–89	20
2	<i>i thank You God</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), m. 8	26
3	<i>i thank You God</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 225–229	28
4	<i>i thank You God</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 8–12	30
5	<i>i thank You God</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 44–47	32
6	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 31–34	35
7a	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 59–60	37
7b	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 92–93	38
8	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 59–63	40
9	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 5–7, contrabass	41
10	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 116–118	42
11a	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 4–6	44
11b	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 39–41	45
11c	<i>Veni Creator</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 83–84	45
12	<i>Mariner’s Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 29–30, piano	55
13	<i>Mariner’s Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 1–3	56

<u>Example</u>		<u>Page</u>
14	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 154–159, soprano saxophone and soprano	57
15	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 1–3	59
16	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 58–59	61
17	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 60–63 saxophone and SATB voices	62
18a	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 6–8, soprano voice	64
18b	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 79–84, tenor voice	64
19	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 16– 22	66
20	<i>Mariner's Carol</i> (from <i>American Triptych</i> ), mm. 89– 93	68
21	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , m.1, 192	74
22	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 61–63	79
23	<i>The Nine Muses: Piano/Vocal Score</i> , m. 178	84
24	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 58–60	86
25	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 1–2, Bass 1	89
26	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 15–19, Soprano 1-2	90
27a	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 55–57, alto	90
27b	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 77–81, soprano	90
28	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 142–145, tenor	91

<u>Example</u>		<u>Page</u>
29	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , m. 201, alto solo	91
30	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , m. 237–239, soprano solo	92
31	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 249–251	93
32	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 201–202	95
33	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 96–98	96
34	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 183–185	99
35	<i>The Nine Muses</i> , mm. 111–113	100

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Structure – <i>i thank You God</i>	16
Table 2	Tonal Centers – <i>i thank You God</i>	23
Table 3	Formal structure – <i>Veni Creator</i>	36
Table 4	Tonal Organization – <i>Veni Creator</i>	43
Table 5	Poetry Comparison – <i>Veni Creator</i>	48
Table 6	Formal Structure – <i>Mariner’s Carol</i>	54
Table 7	Tonal Organization – <i>Mariner’s Carol</i>	63
Table 8	Formal Structure – <i>The Nine Muses</i>	76
Table 9	Percussion Usage – <i>The Nine Muses</i>	81
Table 10	Tonal Organization – <i>The Nine Muses</i>	88

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Purpose of the Study*

This study is designed to discuss and analyze selected choral works of Dr. David Conte that utilize various combinations of ensemble accompaniment. Choral works that are scored for piano four-hands and various combinations of percussion instruments will be discussed. Two of Conte's major works, namely *An American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses*, will be considered in depth.

#### *Need for the Study*

David Conte (b.1955) is a composer with a rich compositional heritage. His formal education includes composition studies at Bowling Green State University, followed by graduate study at Cornell University. His honors include recognition as a Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellow, an Aspen Music Festival Conducting Fellow and a Fulbright Scholar.

As a Fulbright Scholar through Bowling Green, Conte studied with Nadia Boulanger at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau. Boulanger is remembered as one of the foremost composition teachers of the twentieth century. Conte recalls that one of Boulanger's great gifts was how hard she inspired him to

work.<sup>1</sup> William Trafka, music director at St. Bartholomew's Church of New York City, recognized traces of Boulanger's vocal harmony teaching method in David's compositions, noting that each harmony is "beautifully poised in his music."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) National President-Elect, and Chair of the Department of Choral and Sacred Music at the University of Southern California, believes Conte has his own voice as a composer due in part to Boulanger's brilliance as a teacher.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to his studies with Boulanger, Conte was invited to spend the summer of 1982 with Aaron Copland, studying the composer's compositional sketches. Prior to accepting a post at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in 1985, he taught at Colgate University, Cornell University, Keuka College (New York) and Interlochen Center for the Arts. In 1991 he also became the Composer-in-Residence for the San Francisco theater company, *Thick Description*.

He has published over seventy compositions, including works for orchestra, chorus, solo voice, chamber music, organ, piano, guitar and harp, in addition to recent movie score compositions. He has received commissions from Chanticleer, the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, the Dayton, Oakland, and Stockton Symphonies, the American Guild of Organists, Sonoma City Opera and the

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<sup>1</sup> Conte, David, "The Teaching Methods of Nadia Boulanger," (lecture, Nadia Boulanger Symposium, University of Colorado, Boulder, October 9, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> William Trafka, email to author, July 15, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe, email to author, July 13, 2010.

Gerbode Foundation. He was also honored with the highly esteemed ACDA Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission in 2007.

Since the 1980s, Conte's choral works have received numerous performances at ACDA regional and national conventions, suggesting acceptance in the US choral repertoire. In addition to numerous performances at conventions, high school All-State concerts and collegiate programs, his compositions have been recorded by top-tier ensembles such as Chanticleer, St. Olaf College Choir, the American Repertory Singers, and Electra Women's Ensemble.

Numerous conductors and educators have enjoyed positive encounters with Conte's works. Leo Nestor, composer and director of the American Repertory Singers and director at the Catholic University of America acknowledged, "I think David Conte is a person we need to pay more attention to."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Scheibe similarly provides praise to Conte's works, stating:

I believe David has a unique voice. He is careful in all aspects of his compositional process. His choice of text, harmonic language, phrasing and balance, while not always easy, is well thought out and challenges singer and conductor alike.<sup>5</sup>

Because of his effective manner in setting text, many other prominent conductors, including Rodney Eichenberger, Ronald Staheli, David DeVenney, Anton Armstrong, Sigrid Johnson and Jerry Blackstone have also been drawn to

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

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe, email to author, July 13, 2010.

Conte's works.<sup>6</sup> Various composers have identified the rhythm in Conte's works as the characteristic which attracted them to his compositions.<sup>7</sup> Other features of Conte's works recognized by conductors include lush harmonic language, dramatic impact, singable lines, rich sonorities, and sense of vocal color. Still others simply love his music because it is well crafted, or they feel "it wears well."<sup>8</sup>

### *Scope of the Study*

This study will include formal analysis of two extended works for SATB choir and instrumental ensemble. The first of these works is *An American Triptych*, a 20-minute composition in three sections featuring texts by three different North American authors. The second piece is a 15-minute work entitled *The Nine Muses*, featuring the poetry of John Stirling Walker, which was composed for the 2007 National ACDA Convention as the Brock Memorial Commission.

### *Methodology*

In these extended works, the structure, texture, tonal organization, melody, rhythm, dynamics and text setting will be discussed and analyzed, as will as the relationship of the instrumental accompaniment to the overall compositions.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Artemus Conran, "A Study of David Conte's Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-Orchestral Score Complement" (DMA dissertation, University of Arizona, 2003), 177-183.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Structural analysis of the major works will include formal identification of the movements and sections of each piece, as well as formal structural organization. Analysis of textural factors will comprise examination of compositional elements (e.g., homophony, polyphony, counterpoint, and harmonic practices), and will also include the scoring of instruments and voices, and the use of vocal and instrumental techniques in the composition. Analysis of the tonal organization includes recognition of tonal/modal centers and other areas of harmonic interest. The analysis of melody will reflect range, tessitura and types of melodic phrases. Rhythmic analysis will examine the rhythmic cells and groupings used, and the application of dynamics. The setting of text will then be analyzed, including characteristics of the text itself, and how the composer portrays the text musically.

The appendix includes transcripts from multiple interviews with the composer, held either in person or on the phone, and an interview with John Stirling Walker, poet of *The Nine Muses*.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Biographical Information*

David Conte's biographical information has been well documented by Dr. Michael Artemus Conran in his dissertation entitled *A Study of David Conte's Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-Orchestral Complement*.<sup>9</sup> Only a brief introduction to the composer (in addition to information provided in Chapter One) will be provided in this section.

David Joseph Conte was born in Denver, Colorado on December 20, 1955. Both parents were musicians. His father, Cosmo, played trumpet in the Air Force Academy Band, and his mother, Nancy, sang in the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus with Robert Shaw. In his youth, Conte studied piano and participated in choir. His choir director at Lakewood High School in Lakewood, Ohio, B. Neil Davis, made a positive impact on David, and Conte asserts to this day that he has never been a member of a better choir.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 20-25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

Conte entered Bowling Green State University as a piano major, but by his junior year of college he had changed his major to composition. After his Fulbright Studies with Boulanger, and his graduation from Bowling Green (Bachelor of Music, *magna cum laude*), Conte began attending Cornell University. At Cornell he majored in composition with a minor in choral conducting, receiving his Master of Fine Arts degree in 1981 and his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1983. One of Conte's teachers at Cornell was William Austin, a musicologist who had a great influence on Steve Reich. It was through Austin that Conte became familiar with Reich's works, which have influenced Conte's compositions.<sup>11</sup>

Conte held interim faculty positions in New York at both Cornell University and at Colgate University, and was an Assistant Professor of Music at Keuka College (NY) through 1985. In the fall of 1985 he became part of the faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he continues to work today.

### *Review of Literature*

Although a prolific and successful composer, there is a relatively small amount of research written about David Conte and his works. Prior to the present study, the only other source on his choral works is a dissertation by Dr. Michael Artemus Conran (mentioned previously) which covers Conte's choral works with non-orchestral complement.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 24.

Additional research includes Conte's compositions as part of more broad studies. Two of these are in regards to his organ compositions. The first, *Contemporary American Organ Music: Defining the Compositional Potential of the Pipe Organ in Conversations with Composers* is by Abby Hallberg Siegfried,<sup>12</sup> and the second, *Twentieth Century American Organ Compositions: Selected Composers and Their Works* is by Sabrina Lynn Adrian.<sup>13</sup> The third dissertation was written by Patrick Coyle and is entitled *Significant Male Voice Repertory Commissioned by American Gay Men's Choruses*.<sup>14</sup> It includes discussion of *Eos*, a major choral-orchestral work by Conte. Dr. Coyle's paper touches only briefly on Dr. Conte as a composer, and is focused specifically on *Eos* only. Therefore, these documents have little relevance to the study at hand.

Additional resources on David Conte are available on his website.<sup>15</sup> It is currently organized to provide (a) information regarding upcoming events and news, (b) listening examples of his works, (c) video excerpts, (d) a list of works, (e) compact discs with recordings of his works, (f) biographical information, (g)

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<sup>12</sup>Abby Hallberg Siegfried, "Contemporary American Organ Music: Defining the Compositional Potential of the Pipe Organ in Conversations with Composers" (DMA dissertation, University of Washington, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Sabrina Lynn Adrian, "Twentieth Century American Organ Compositions: Selected Composers and their Works" (DMA dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Coyle, "Significant Male Voice Repertory Commissioned by American Gay Men's Choruses" (DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.davidconte.net>

reviews of his compositions, (h) a list of articles, (i) a photo gallery, (j) contact information, and (k) internet links to his publisher and other organizations and people.

Of all of the information found on the website, the articles listed therein are of greatest worth to the present study. Three are featured there, namely *The Choral World of David Conte: A Conversation with the Composer*,<sup>16</sup> *The Teaching Methods of Nadia Boulanger*,<sup>17</sup> and *Ralph Vaughan William's Three Shakespeare Songs: An Analysis for Conductors and Composers*.<sup>18</sup>

*The Choral World of David Conte: A Conversation with the Composer* was published in the February 2007 issue of the *Choral Journal*. The article provides an introduction to the composer through interviews DeVenney conducts with him, presenting Conte as the Brock Memorial Commission Composer. This column includes discussion on Conte's background, some biographical information, commissions, overview of his *oeuvre*, compositional style, and the compositional process of *The Nine Muses*. It also contains a brief discussion of his non-choral

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<sup>16</sup> David P. DeVenney, "The Choral World of David Conte: A Conversation with the Composer," *Choral Journal* 47, no.8 (February 2007): 77-80.

<sup>17</sup> David Conte, "The Teaching Methods of Nadia Boulanger," (lecture, Nadia Boulanger Symposium, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, October 9, 2004). <http://www.davidconte.net/Boulanger.pdf> (accessed July 28, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> David Conte, "Ralph Vaughan William's Three Shakespeare Songs: An Analysis for Conductors and Composers" *Choral Journal*, 42, no. 9 (April 2002): 9-23.

works, reasons for writing choral music, text setting, poets, preferred sources and advice for composers.

*The Teaching Methods of Nadia Boulanger* is a lecture transcription from the Nadia Boulanger Symposium at the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 2004. The lecture provides insight into Conte's life as a student of Boulanger, and describes Conte's own teaching philosophy. He explains how Boulanger helped "open his ears" to the realization that music is both vertical and horizontal, and how she helped him listen to what the inner voices were doing in his compositions. Much of the lecture was opened to questions, and he fielded questions on his works for organ, the importance of memory in Boulanger's training, having a musical model to follow, and originality. Levin then provided insights from his own experiences with Boulanger. Additional topics discussed include MIDI, layered rhythms, the environment in which people experience their music, the balance between intuitive and intellectual approaches in composition, twentieth century techniques (including serialism and minimalism), poetry, and the commitment required in learning a piece of music.

Three additional noteworthy resources on his website are worthy of note are the listening page, the list of compact discs containing recordings of his pieces, and a collection of reviews of his works. On the listening page, one can access entire performances of *The Nine Muses* performed by the premiering conductors.<sup>19</sup> The comprehensive list of recordings found on his website provides a cursory

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.davidconte.net/audio.html>

glance of his total compositional output.<sup>20</sup> As one might expect, the information found on his reviews page is not limited to just his choral works, but includes all genres for which he has composed.<sup>21</sup> These reviews reflect positively on live performances, recordings, and on his compositions in general. Comments on eighteen choral works are also included.

In addition to the published and internet sources listed above, information presented in this study will also be derived from emails, musical scores (including composer's notes), CD jackets, and interviews.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.davidconte.net/recordings.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.davidconte.net/reviews.html>

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITIONS

#### American Triptych

*American Triptych* is a three-movement work based on poetry from three North American poets, e.e. cummings (*i thank You God*), Bliss Carman (*Veni Creator*) and William Stanley Merwin (*Mariner's Carol*). The triptych is written for SATB choir and features a soprano saxophone soloist through the second and third movements. The piece was commissioned by The Reading Choral Society of Pennsylvania for its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary season in 1999. David DeVenney conducted the premiere in November of the same year at the Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Reading, Pennsylvania.

#### *i thank You God*

The first movement of the work is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, percussion, harp, piano four-hands, and contrabass. Performance of *i thank You God* takes approximately five-and-a-half minutes.

#### *Structure*

Like many of Conte's compositions, this piece is through-composed, and its formal structure or musical design is similar to the stanzas of the poem to which the music is set. By definition, *i thank You God* is associative music because it is



a free form of music set to a text.<sup>22</sup> The design of the piece is reflective of Conte's belief that "everything comes from the text."<sup>23</sup> The movement is organized into four sections reflecting the four stanzas of Cummings' poem. (see complete text below). Each musical section correlates with a poetic stanza, referred to herein as stanza-sections. Therefore, Stanza-Section One begins with the text "i thank You God," Stanza-Section Two begins with "i who have died," and so forth.

*i thank You God*

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any—lifted from the no  
of all nothing—human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Leon Stein, *Structure & Style, Expanded Edition*. (Miami: Summy-Birchard Inc., 1979), 245.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Artemus Conran, "A Study of David Conte's Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-Orchestral Score Complement" (DMA Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2003), 14.

<sup>24</sup> George J. Firmage, ed., *e.e. cummings Complete Poems 1904-1962*. (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 1991), 663.

The first three stanza-sections are structurally reflective of the poetry, with the text set in a very straightforward manner. This is one possible reason for the constant shift of meter and unpredictable phrase lengths in the music, and is somewhat reflective of Cummings' poetic style. Although almost no two phrases are alike, they are unified by a clearly discernable melodic motive in each stanza-section. Each motive provides a sense of continuity within each section with each section clearly independent of the other. The fourth stanza-section is the longest musical section but is based on the shortest declamation of text, and in contrast to the others, text repetition is employed extensively. Due to the text repetition, the phrase lengths in the fourth stanza-section are more similar, although most are still irregular.

Two key musical events are characteristic in the stanza-sections. First, each stanza-section is separated by a short instrumental interlude acting as a transition, an introduction of new musical material, or both. In this way, the interludes are comprised of the two sections they separate; thus the interludes may actually overlap either stanza-section. Secondly, the end of each stanza-section is highlighted by a climactic musical point of arrival. These points of arrival are clearly identified by the last statement of text from the poetic stanza and are presented in *fortissimo* dynamics, with use of full instrumentation and choir. Additionally, three of the four stanza-sections feature the choir holding a sustained chord while the rhythmic drive is provided by the instrumental accompaniment.

After the four sections, there is a reprise of material from the first stanza-section. By definition, a reprise is ‘a return to a first section of music after an intervening and contrasting section; the repeat can be exact, or varied.’<sup>25</sup> In *i thank You God* the reprise is varied by condensing the first stanza-section to twenty-nine measures in length and is limited to a brief introduction, while extending the climactic musical point of arrival.

The formal structure of *i thank You God* is shown in the following table. This table shows the length of each stanza-section, a brief description of the texture or media within the formal phrases and subsections, and statement of function or salient feature of each of these sub sections within the stanza-sections.

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<sup>25</sup> Alison Latham, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), s.v. “reprise.”

Table 1. Structure – *i thank You God*.

Measures	Section	Function/Feature
<u>1 – 40</u>	<u>stanza-section 1 – (A)</u>	
1 – 7	instrumental introduction	introduces tonality and melodic material
8 – 34	choral presence	presentation of text
32 – 34	musical point of arrival	sustained choral chord/full instrumentation
35 – 42	instrumental interlude (II-1)	in two parts (II-1a, II-1b)
35 – 40	II-1a	SS1 closing material
<u>41 – 80</u>	<u>stanza-section 2 – (B)</u>	
41 – 42	II-1b	SS2 introductory material
43 – 74	choral presence	presentation of text
72 – 74	musical point of arrival	sustained choral chord/full instrumentation
75 – 85	instrumental interlude (II-2)	in two parts (II-2a, II -2b)
75 – 80	II-2a	closing material – SS2
<u>81 – 139</u>	<u>stanza-section 3 – (C)</u>	
81 – 85	II-2b	introductory material – SS3
86 – 137	choral presence	presentation of text
123 – 136	musical point of arrival	thrice repeated sustained choral chord/full instrumentation
137 – 142	instrumental interlude (II-3)	in two parts (II-3a, II -3b)
137 – 139	II-3a	SS3 closing material
<u>140 – 214</u>	<u>stanza-section 4 – (D)</u>	
140 – 142	II-3b	SS4 introductory material
143 – 214	choral presence	presentation of text
205 – 214	musical point of arrival	polyphonic choral statement /full instrumentation
<u>215 – 234</u>	<u>reprise – (A1)</u>	
215	instrumental interlude (II-4)	abbreviated introduction
216 – 234	choral presence	presentation of text
226 – 234	musical point of arrival	thrice repeated sustained choral chord/full instrumentation

SS = Stanza-section

II = Instrumental Interlude

### *Texture*

In accordance with the guidelines outlined by LaRue, the discussion of texture will be comprised mainly of timbre, or spatial organization, affecting the category of sound.<sup>26</sup> Analysis of the vocal writing will be followed by inspection of the role of instruments and how the two work together.

Considering the vocal writing first, *i thank You God*, utilizes homophony as the primary method of textual delivery. His use of four-part homophonic writing is present through nearly the entire first stanza-section of the piece (mm. 8–34). He uses duet writing, as found in Stanza-Section Two with tenor-bass, and soprano-alto combinations (mm. 43–49) and an alto-bass combination in Stanza-Section Four (mm. 150–152). Duet writing is also used in imitative-style entrances (mm. 101–130), and antiphonally (mm. 161–165, 170–188).

The various types of homophonic writing are used to emphasize certain textual phrases or to reflect a progression of thought. Such a case is the ‘awakening’ reflected in Stanza-Section Four (“now the ears of my ears awake”). The texture begins in four-part homophony (mm. 143–147 / 155–159) as a straightforward declamation, then progresses to an antiphonal setting (mm. 161–188), eventually completing the Stanza-Section with the climactic passage in four-part polyphony.

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<sup>26</sup> Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2008), 10-11.

The texture of *i thank You God* is greatly enhanced by its unique instrumentation. The scoring used in this study is actually a reduced scoring from the original, which called for a twenty-one piece orchestra of saxophones, brass, keyboards and percussion. The instrumentation was intended to give the work a “decidedly American character,” but proved difficult to perform.<sup>27</sup> The reduced score (written for the West Chester State University Chorus and David DeVenney, conductor) is more accessible for performers and still “has a lot of color in it.”<sup>28</sup>

Comparable to Conte’s *Invocation and Dance*, piano and percussion play a vital role in the texture of *American Triptych* and are the core of the accompaniment ensemble. The piano part could provide sufficient accompaniment alone for performance purposes and provides not only pitch reinforcement to other ensemble instruments, but also acts as a melodic instrument in its own right.<sup>29</sup> The percussion provides different colors from xylophone, marimba, suspended cymbal, chimes, glockenspiel, triangle, hi-hat and vibraphone. Concerning the use of piano and percussion, Conte states:

There’s a certain tradition that got started with piano-percussion, way back in 1917 with [Stravinsky’s] *Les noces*. And then a piece like *Carmina Burana* [and] the Bartók Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion; so there’s a kind of composer, like me, who’s... inspired

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<sup>27</sup> David Conte, *American Triptych*, text by e.e. cummings, W.S. Merwin and Bliss Carman. Composer’s notes to unpublished score, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

<sup>29</sup> David Conte, *American Triptych*, text by e.e. cummings, W.S. Merwin and Bliss Carman. Composer’s notes to unpublished score, 1999.

by tradition. I often think of this combination. It can be a kind of substitute for a larger orchestra; groups can perform it that don't have access to an orchestra.<sup>30</sup>

The percussion is used in a consistent manner to achieve predictable results within the first movement of *American Triptych*. The combination of xylophone, marimba and suspended cymbal (played with stick) provides consistency as they are used throughout Stanza-Sections one, two and four, until their respective climactic points, when the xylophone is replaced by the glockenspiel. One of the salient features of Stanza-Section Three is the use of hi-hat with wire brushes, accenting the triple-duple-duple subdivision of the 7/8 time signature (see Example 1 below). This section featuring the hi-hat brings with it the American character sought in the piece,<sup>31</sup> and in a small way is reminiscent of the percussion sound existing in American rock and roll bands.

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<sup>30</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

<sup>31</sup> David Conte, *American Triptych*, text by e.e. cummings, W.S. Merwin and Bliss Carman. Composer's notes to unpublished score, 1999.

The image shows a musical score for Example 1, David Conte's *i thank You God*, measures 86-89. The score is arranged in four systems. The first system contains the vocal parts for Tenor (T.) and Bass (B.). Both parts are marked with *mf* and have the lyrics "howshould tast - ing" and "tast - ing". The second system contains three percussion parts: Perc. I, Perc. II, and Perc. III. Perc. I and Perc. II are marked with a dash, indicating they are silent. Perc. III is marked with *p* and features a Hi-Hat (with wire brushes) playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Example 1. David Conte, *i thank You God*, mm. 86–89.

It is interesting to note that throughout the four sections of the piece, the percussion is usually sounding pitches higher than the vocalists (some exceptions exist). Although not notated as such, one must keep in mind that the marimba sounds as written, the xylophone sounds an octave above the notes in the score and the glockenspiel sounds two octaves higher than the notes on the page. Hence, during the climactic moments of stanza-sections one, two, and the reprise, the percussion maintains the highest sounding pitch of the ensemble, accomplished by the addition of the glockenspiel.

The harp primarily plays a supporting role in *i thank You God* by doubling piano and/or percussion parts. Although the harp is not essential for performance, it provides color and texture to the ensemble.<sup>32</sup> In moments where the harp is in

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



the foreground of the accompaniment, cue notes are added to the piano part, revealing the necessity of those passages in the accompaniment. When not doubling parts or adding color or reinforcement to the harmonies, the harp is utilized in its most basic role of sounding a rapid succession of notes, or arpeggios.

Similar to the harp, the contrabass plays a supportive role and is used primarily for color. Keeping in mind that it is notated an octave higher than its sounding pitch, the bass provides another dimension of color and texture to the ensemble (although the contrabass notes are actually doubled by the piano most of the time). Additionally, Conte utilizes the option of playing the strings bowed (*arco*) or plucked (*pizzicato*) to gain supplementary effects.

The effectiveness of the ensemble accompaniment is utilized not only by its presence, but also by its absence. Conte often sets the chorus apart by dropping instruments and giving portions of the movement an “unaccompanied” feel (mm. 8–10, 14–15, and 155–158). Reduction of accompanimental forces also brings about a similar effect. The most common reduction is to use piano only, or only two hands of the four-hand piano accompaniment. This is seen when the piano doubles parts (mm. 161–165, 205–207) or holds a sustained chord as background to the choir (mm. 43–44).

### *Tonal Organization*

Conte is a composer who is firmly grounded in tonality, but it is his tonal coloring of modal inflections which give energy and harmonic interest to his

works.<sup>33</sup> Conte uses modal and chromatic inflections (brief shifts in tonality) to bring out the meaning of a poetic phrase or to musically underscore a key word or mood. He frequently modulates from one section of a work to another (often by thirds or by borrowing from the parallel major and minor) as a method to harmonically represent the poetic structure of a work.<sup>34</sup> The first movement of *American Triptych* is thus organized. The tonal centers of this movement are highlighted in Table 2.

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Artemus Conran, “A Study of David Conte’s Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-Orchestral Score Complement” (DMA dissertation, University of Arizona, 2003), 174.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 174-175

Table 2. Tonal Centers – *i thank You God*.

Section	Tonal Center	Measures
<u>SS 1 (A)</u>	C major	1 – 18
	Eb major	19 – 26
	Modulating Transition	26 – 31
	A major	32 – 40
Interlude	A major	36 – 42
<u>SS 2 (B)</u>	A major	41 – 46
	C major	47 – 54
	Modulating Transition	54 – 61
	B major	62 – 67
	Db major	68 – 75
Interlude	Db major	76 – 85
<u>SS 3 (C)</u>	Db major	81 – 109
	Bb Aeolian	110 – 118
	Db major	119 – 123
	Bb major	123 – 139
Interlude	Bb major	137 – 139
Interlude	Enriched D Lydian with flat 6 inflection	140 – 142
	Enriched D Lydian with flat 6 inflection	140 – 151
<u>SS4 (D)</u>	Enriched Bb Lydian with flat 6 inflection	152 – 161
	Enriched F# Lydian with flat 6 inflection	162 – 170
	G major	171 – 180
	Eb major	181 – 189
	Bb major	190 – 198
	F major	199 – 204
	D major	205 – 207
	G major	208 – 214
	<u>Reprise (A1)</u>	C major
Interlude	C major	215

All of the notes in Conte's compositions are related to each other. His statement that 'every note [comes] out of every other note' provides a basis for the melodic and harmonic relationships in his writing.<sup>35</sup> He applies this approach through a method defined as *mixture*, which is used to "indicate the appearance of elements from minor in the context of major or the reverse."<sup>36</sup> It is through mixture that the instrumental introduction based in C major (mm. 1–7) includes inflections to C minor by insertion of Eb and Bb (mm. 3–7).

He also uses secondary mixture to achieve otherwise distant tonal centers and inflections. Secondary mixture is defined as "the alteration of the third of a triad where such alteration does not result from normal mixture."<sup>37</sup> One example of secondary mixture the association he achieves between C major (mm. 1–18) and A major (mm. 32–40). The relative minor of C major is A minor (with C natural as the third of the A minor triad). But by altering the third of the A minor triad from C to C#, the triad changes sonority from minor to major. He then utilizes A major as a new tonal center, having arrived there through secondary mixture.

Conte frequently employs mixture to connect current passages of music with other harmonic events within the movement. For example, the mixture noted

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<sup>35</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, October 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Aldwell and Carl Schachter, *Harmony and Voice Leading*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 2003), 391.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 398.

in mm. 3–7 includes Bb and Eb in the piano part. This acts as a c minor inflection and prefigures the arrival of Eb major in measure 19. Similarly, in the reprise section and return to C (tonal center), the music gestures toward D major (mm. 219–221) and Bb major (mm. 223–224), looking back to previous tonal centers in the piece. In Stanza-Section Four, mixture incorporates Aeolian and Lydian modes. Measures 140–151 are in D Lydian, while borrowing the b6 inflection from D Aeolian (natural minor), a pattern followed in Bb and F# Lydian as the piece progresses as noted in Table 2.

Conte utilizes pandiatonic extended harmonies at numerous points in this composition as well.<sup>38</sup> R. Evan Copley defines pandiatonicism as “a technique in which any tone of a diatonic scale is used freely with any other tone, or any combination of tones, from that scale.”<sup>39</sup> Copley’s description of pandiatonicism is an accurate representation of some moments in Conte’s *i thank You God*:

Composers writing in this style apparently do not try either to create or to avoid triads but instead try to create strongly rhythmic textures with two or more voices pursuing their own independent parts. The parts frequently move scalewise, and often are “thickened by the addition of a voice moving in thirds, fourths, or sixths. ...[this style]... maintains a desirable degree of independence between voices<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> David Conte, email to author, September 15, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> R. Evan Copley, *Harmony: Baroque to Contemporary, Part Two* (Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company, 1991), 136.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

*I thank You God* is marked by strongly rhythmic textures, with multiple independent voices; also present are stepwise motion and intervallic leaps of a sixth. An example of a pandiatonic chord is found in measure 8, where the pitches C, D, E, F, and G (scale degrees 1–5) are all present in the chord, functioning as a IV chord. The E is added as a seventh, G as a ninth, and the third (A) is omitted (see Example 2 below).

The image shows a musical score for measure 8 of David Conte's *i thank You God*. The score is arranged in a vertical system with the following parts from top to bottom:

- Perc. I:** Treble clef, quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest.
- Perc. II:** Treble clef, quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest.
- Perc. III:** Bass clef, quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest. Marked *secco*.
- Hp. (Harp):** Treble clef, quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest. Marked *f*. A box labeled 'A' is placed above the first G4.
- Piano 4-hands:** Treble and Bass clefs. Treble clef has a quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest. Bass clef has a quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest. A box labeled 'A' is placed above the first G4 in the treble staff, with a circled '8ve' below it.
- Cb. (Cello):** Bass clef, quarter note G4, quarter rest, quarter note G4, quarter rest.

The measure number '8' is written below the piano staves. The dynamic marking *f* (forte) is present in the Perc. I, Perc. II, and Hp. parts.

Example 2. David Conte, *i thank You God*, m. 8.

Quartal harmony is also present within this movement, although still based in tonality. According to Copley, quartal harmony is an idiom in which superimposed fourths are used to create sonorities, and states that quartal harmony is seldom used exclusive of other twentieth century idioms in extended passages.<sup>41</sup> Stanza-Section Four has the most common appearance of quartal harmonies, both in the accompaniment and the choral parts. The quartal chords in the accompaniment often occur at rhythmically accented moments (mm. 153–154), and in the choir to accent important words (m. 157, 159, 226–228). Quartal harmonies are also highlighted on extended chords, as in mm. 226–228 (see Example 3 below). In each of these cases, the use of quartal harmony is accomplished within the framework of the established tonal centers. For example in mm. 226–228 the quartal harmonies are achieved by the implementation of the quartal sonority, where the Bass G-C, the Tenor/Alto E-A, and the Soprano D-G each make intervals of a perfect fourth, all functioning within the key of C major (see Example 3 below).

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 118

225

W

S. maz - ing day! this day!

A. maz - ing day! this day!

T. maz - ing day! this day!

B. maz - ing day! this day!

Example 3. David Conte, *i thank You God*, mm. 225–229.

### Melody

The melodic structure of *i thank You God* is based on the intervals larger than stepwise motion, often employing the intervals of fourths and fifths, incorporated in varying phrase lengths. The leaping fifths were intended to give a sense of strength, optimism and confidence, and the kind of extroverted feeling conveyed by the text.<sup>42</sup> Stanza-Section One presents the melodic idea in mm 8–11, with the prominent intervals being C-G, E-B, F-C and G-D. The presence of fifths is used in a sequential manner in mm. 25–30 in developing the musically climactic moment of the stanza-section. Stanza-Section Two has a different musical line, but is still based roughly on the same intervallic value of D-A in measure 43 and E (m 43) – B (mm. 44–45), separated by embellishments. The inference of the interval of a fifth in Stanza-Section Three is easily recognized in

<sup>42</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, October 2010.



the tenor/bass melody and the alto/soprano echo (mm. 86–88). Similar intervallic relationships are easily detected in Stanza-Section Four, made apparent by the high and low points of the melodic line spelling the perfect fifth from F# to C# (mm. 143–147).

### *Rhythm*

With the exception of Stanza-Section Three, *i thank You God* is imbued with constantly shifting meter and rhythmic change. Conte states, “The use of mixed meter comes from Stravinsky and Copland, specifically. It’s something I started doing in ‘*Invocation and Dance*,’ which... is filled with that kind of mixed meter;’ this piece is related to that metrically.”<sup>43</sup> Conte also believes that the settings of American poets like Whitman and Cummings lends itself to multi-meter settings.<sup>44</sup>

One of the greatest reasons for this approach is the idea of prosody, or the patterns of rhythm and sound used in poetry.<sup>45</sup> Based on the prosody, the music goes back and forth between simple and compound meters and asymmetrical mixed meters, based on words stress and rhythmic groupings of twos and threes, and how the words fit. Conte asserts the prosody should have “the accented

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “prosody.”

syllables on strong beats, or on the strong part of the beat, without exception.”<sup>46</sup>

The rhythm in Stanza-Section One is a prime example of this. Conte uses almost the exact amount of notes as Cummings does syllables in order to set the text. The strong words or syllables are placed on the downbeat of the measure, or articulated with an accent, such as the second syllable of the word “amazing,” placed on the strong beat of the 6/8 measure (m. 10), followed by “day” on the downbeat of the measure 11 (see Example 4 below).

8 A

S. *f* i thank you God for most this a - maz - ing

A. *f* i thank you God for most this a - maz - ing

T. *f* i thank you God for most this a - maz - ing

B. *f* i thank you God for most this a - maz - ing

A

11

S. day:

A. day:

T. day:

B. day:

Example 4. David Conte, *i thank You God*, mm. 8–12.

<sup>46</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, October 2010.

A similar approach is taken in Stanza-Section Two with “illimitably earth” in mm. 70–72. There, the stresses syllable is placed at the downbeat of a 7/8 measure followed by “earth” on the downbeat of a 9/8 measure.

Conte takes a different approach in Stanza-Section Three. His goal was to “get into a groove” rhythmically, and he does so with the 7/8 meter grouped as 3+2+2 in mm. 79–139.<sup>47</sup> It is in this section that Conte alters the text to fit the meter. This is done by text repetition, inserting “how should” before the senses listed in mm. 91, 96, 101–102, and by re-phrasing Cummings’ words to form the question “how doubt you?” (mm. 127–137). Here, he uses equal note values on the word “how should,” which receive equal weight both in to spoken poem and Conte’s setting (as preceding the articulation of the senses).

Conte also uses polyrhythm, or simultaneous use of different rhythms in separate parts of the musical texture in this composition. A prime example of this is found in mm. 45–46 where he sets syncopated figures over straightforward rhythmic gestures as groupings (see Example 5 below).

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<sup>47</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

44

Pno. 4-Hands.

44

Example 5. David Conte, *i thank You God*, m. 44–47.

### *Text*

Nearly all of what has been discussed thus far concerning *i thank You God* has resulted from Conte's attention to text. The melodic and phrase structure, rhythm, tonal centers and harmonies are all connected in some way or another to the words of e.e. cummings' poem.

As stated before, the intervallic characteristic of the melody was calculated to represent the extroverted feeling of the text.<sup>48</sup> There are tonal and harmonic choices based on the text as well. The opening statement in mm. 8–11 based in C major modulates to the key of Eb major for setting the text “blue true dream of sky” (mm. 18–23). Conte comments that he wished to portray a ‘dream image’ by modulating to Eb in order to more accurately reflect the text, stating “there is a softer quality to the word there.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, October 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

The idea of ears and eyes “opening” is portrayed through the use of quartal harmony in Stanza-Section Four. In addition to the melodic structure of a fifth, the perfect fourths found in the quartal chords helps convey this “opening” feeling, as though the awakening came by a flood of thoughts and emotions. Such is the case when the unaccompanied choir sings the words “a-wake” and “op-ened” (underline added, mm. 157, 159), with soprano-alto and tenor-bass lines in fourths.

### Veni Creator

The second movement of *American Triptych* is a contemporary setting of a poem loosely related to the tenth century Latin hymn of the same name. It is more lyrical in character than movements I and III, and gives sections of the chorus a verse of unison writing, accompanied by obligato solo lines in the accompaniment ensemble.<sup>50</sup> *Veni Creator* is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, percussion, harp, piano four-hands, contrabass and solo soprano saxophone. Performance of *Veni Creator* takes approximately eight minutes.

### Structure

Similar to the first movement of *American Triptych*, *Veni Creator* is associative with its structural organization related to the poetry. This movement is organized by use of melody and by the grouping of poetic stanzas, accomplished by setting multiple stanzas to a melodic idea presented in a section. The work

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<sup>50</sup> David Conte, *American Triptych*, text by e.e. cummings, W.S. Merwin and Bliss Carman. Composer’s notes to unpublished score, 1999.

could be considered as a sort of embellished or modified strophic form because the melodic ideas are set in a similar pattern in association with poetic stanzas.<sup>51</sup>

There are two prominent features that define the five major sections. These features include the varied presentation of melodic material, and the climactic combining of forces (i.e., addition of instruments and/or voices) signaling the close of a section. Additionally, instrumental interludes occur after sections B, C, and D, clearly delineating sections and providing a means of tonal modulation and melodic transition. An example of the climactic combining of forces is found in mm. 31–34 at the end of section B with the inclusion of marimba, vibraphone, and soprano, tenor and bass voices (see Example 6 below).

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<sup>51</sup> Leon Stein, *Structure & Style, Expanded Edition* (Miami: Summy-Birchard, 1979), 177.

31

S.Sax.

31

S. *mp* *mf* *p*  
We are thy breath.

A. *p* *mf* *p*  
pale ghost of prayer, We are thy breath.

T. *p* *mf* *p*  
We are thy breath.

B. *p* *mf* *p*  
We are thy breath.

Perc. I 31 *mp*  
C

Perc. II *p*

Example 6. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 31–34.

Each major section in this setting emphasizes a different instrument or voice part, or different parts in combination. Table 3 (below) depicts the formal structure of this movement, identifying inclusive measures of the major events, and shows how the poetic and melodic ideas amalgamate. The poem is found in its entirety on page in Table 5.

Table 3. Formal structure – *Veni Creator*.

Measures	Event	Function / Feature
1 – 4	instrumental introduction	
4 – 20	section A	soprano saxophone solo
20 – 34	section B	stanzas 1-2
35 – 39	instrumental interlude 1	
40 – 55	section C	stanzas 3-4
56 – 58	instrumental interlude 2	
59 – 84	section D	stanzas 6-7
84 – 91	instrumental interlude 3	
92 – 136	section E	stanzas 9-10

Essential to the discussion of structure is the presence of ostinati found in the work. By definition, an ostinato is a fairly short melodic, rhythmic, or chordal phrase repeated continuously throughout a piece or section.<sup>52</sup> The structural importance of an ostinato varies according to whether the support it provides is continuous, partial, or sporadic.<sup>53</sup> Although ostinati do not occur throughout the

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<sup>52</sup> Christopher Wilson, “ostinato.” In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4909> (accessed January 11, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Laure Schnapper, “ostinato.” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/grove/music/20547> (accessed January 11, 2011).



entire movement, portions of section D (mm. 59–70) and E (mm. 92–105) contain two ostinati of structural importance due to the harmonic and rhythmic stability gained by their presence. The ostinati are found in the harp and contrabass parts, first presented in mm. 59–60 (see Example 7a below), with the second ostinato also incorporating the piano part, introduced in mm. 92–93 (see Example 7b below).

Example 7a shows the musical score for measures 59–60 of David Conte's *Veni Creator*. The score is in 3/4 time and marked "A tempo". It features four staves:

- Harp (Hp.):** The upper staff is marked *mp* (D major) and the lower staff is marked *mp* (D major). Both staves show a rhythmic ostinato pattern.
- Piano 4-hands (Pno. 4-hnds.):** The upper staff is marked *p* (Vibes) and the lower staff is marked *p* (Harp). The upper staff includes a triplet of eighth notes.
- Contrabass (Cb.):** The lower staff is marked *p*.

All staves begin with a boxed "G" and the tempo marking "A tempo".

Example 7a. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 59–60.

The musical score for Example 7b, David Conte's *Veni Creator*, mm. 92-93, is in 3/4 time. It consists of three staves: Harp (Hp.), Piano 4-hands (Pno. 4-hnds.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Harp part is marked *mp* and consists of chords. The Piano part is also marked *mp* and features a melodic line with a 'K' box above it. The Contrabass part is marked *mp* and features a melodic line with a 'pizz.' box above it. The tempo is marked 'A tempo'.

Example 7b. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 92–93.

### Texture

The second and third movements of Conte's *American Triptych* call for solo soprano saxophone as an obbligato instrument. Conte notes that since the saxophone part is not highly virtuosic, the most important factor is to have an instrumentalist who can obtain a “beautiful sound” from the saxophone.<sup>54</sup> He also states that the choir is still primarily in the foreground of the piece, and that the soprano saxophone's role is to provide commentary on the choral statements as an obbligato instrument.<sup>55</sup> In *Veni Creator*, it is featured as a solo instrument in section A during the choir's absence, then takes on a “commentary” role in

<sup>54</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, October 2010.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

sections C, D and E.<sup>56</sup> During instrumental interludes the saxophone is typically in the background.

The choral writing in *Veni Creator* is fairly unambiguous, and is marked by alterations of choral texture. As mentioned previously, this is accomplished by different voice parts presenting the melody in unison. It is important to note that at the end of sections B, C, and D, all voice parts participate in a homophonic statement of closure (see mm. 54–56, 83–85 and Example 6 above). The greatest variation in the choral writing of the piece occurs during the four-part setting in section E, when the accompaniment is greatly reduced (mm. 119–128), and then withdrawn (mm. 121, 126–128). This contrasting section creates a more intimate choral setting of the text “Go glad and free, Earth to my mother earth, Spirit to thee.”

Conte uses the percussion section in rhythmic, melodic and harmonic roles in *Veni Creator*, calling for vibraphone, marimba, a large suspended cymbal and glockenspiel. The percussion is featured during the introduction and instrumental interludes, and in this capacity are used for a melodic purpose. At other times they emerge to provide a harmonic role and to add variety to the texture. Such is the case in section A, where they are inserted for three short measures to provide a climactic effect and reinforce harmonic closure (mm. 18–20). In mm. 59–83 of section D, the vibraphone presents an ostinato-like or minimalist figure for

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<sup>56</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

rhythmic and harmonic purposes, providing rhythmic syncopation and harmonic support to the voices (see Example 8 below).

Example 8. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 59–63.

During instrumental interludes and the introduction the vibraphone is the predominant melodic percussion instrument, and the marimba is chiefly harmonic. The cymbal enters on two different occasions (mm. 84–85, 111–112) to create greater dynamic contrast. The glockenspiel is employed only once, during the last eight measures of the piece, providing melodic counterpoint to the melodic lines of the saxophone and harp.

As mentioned in the discussion of *i thank You God*, the role of the piano in Conte's writing is often multifaceted. During introductions and interludes it provides harmonic and rhythmic interest, it then becomes more constant during the main sections, providing the constant quarter-note drive of the piece. Like the saxophone, it is also an obligato instrument, carrying the countermelody throughout section B (mm. 20–34), and assuming the melody from the saxophone in m. 59 during the third instrumental interlude. As always, the piano can replace

other pitched instruments when necessary, such as the saxophone (mm. 4–19, 39–54), vibraphone (mm. 59–70, 77–81) and harp (mm. 92–108).

The contrabass reinforces harmony and adds color to the ensemble, often doubling the left hand of the piano and harp.

### *Tonal Organization*

Tonal centers are often highlighted by the instrumental ensemble through the unfolding of a scale by stepwise motion, or by the presence of pedal tones.

The foremost instrument to outline the tonal center is the contrabass, often sounding every note in a particular mode or scale in succession (mm. 20–22, 40–42 and Example 9 below).



Example 9. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 5–7, contrabass.

There are also numerous occasions where the tonal center is more easily discernable due to the presence of a pedal tone. The octatonic scale is recognizable due to the presence of the pedal tone on e, providing a tonic for the scale (e, f, g, g#, a#, b, c#, d, e) as seen in Example 10 below.

116<sup>8<sup>va</sup></sup>

*meno f*

Pno. 4-hnds.

116

*meno f*

116

Cb.

*f*

*p*

Example 10. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 116–118.

A table displaying tonal centers within the structure of the piece, with corresponding measures, is found below in Table 4.

Table 4. Tonal Organization – *Veni Creator*.

Section	Tonal Center	Measures
instrumental introduction	moving to F major	1–4
section A	F major	5–20
section B	F major	19–34
instrumental interlude 1	modulating	35–39
section C	B aeolian (b, c#, d, e, f#, g, a, b)	40–55
instrumental interlude 2	modulating	56–58
section D	B major	59–67
	A major	68–72
	D major	73–77
	B major	78–88
instrumental interlude 3	modulating	85–91
section E	F major	92–105
	A mixolydian (a, b, c#, d, e, f#, g, a)	106–112
	E Octatonic (e, f, g, g#, a#, b, c#, d)	116–118
	F major	119–136

In *Veni Creator*, plagal cadences serve as a unifying element in the piece. In speaking of these, Conte reflects that to him the plagal cadence has a sort of religious feeling; a sort of solemn character to it.<sup>57</sup> The first major cadence in this movement is a IV-I cadence in mm. 4–5, establishing the tonal center of the entire piece. Similarly, the plagal cadence is paramount at the closing of section C

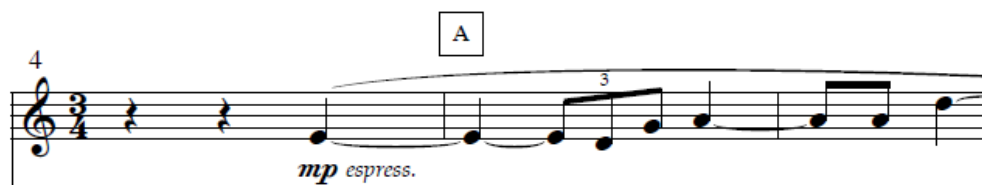
<sup>57</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

(mm. 54–55), and is used to transition from section A to section B (mm. 18–20) and from the second instrumental interlude into section D (58–59).

Conte frequently uses chord substitution in this movement. In measure 84, he substitutes the V chord with a ii<sup>11</sup>. He also substitutes iii<sup>6</sup> for the dominant in the ostinatos of section D, stating the iii<sup>6</sup> “is a dominant substitute that has a softer quality to it – a more complex quality than just a [regular] V would.”<sup>58</sup>

### *Melody*

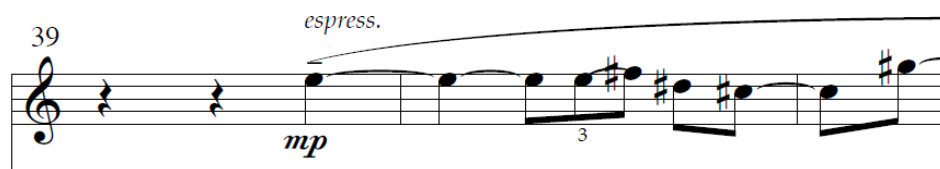
*Veni Creator* is united melodically by two closely related ideas. The first melodic idea is presented by the soprano saxophone in section A. In section B it is restated as a counter-melody, this time played by the first piano in octave unison. In section C the basic melodic idea again appears in the obbligato saxophone part. Here the relative pitches are inverted, embellished, and varied rhythmically (see Examples 11a and 11b below), with additional variations as the obbligato line continues throughout section C. An inverted retrograde version of this embellished melodic idea is also found in section D (see Example 11c below).



Example 11a. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 4–6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.





Example 11b. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 39–41.



Example 11c. David Conte, *Veni Creator*, mm. 83–84.

The second primary melodic idea is set forth by the choir. Although not a strict replica, the melody in each section has a closely related rhythmic line and loosely related intervallic and musical contour. His melodic ideas are most commonly realized in a syllabic union with the text, free of melismatic passages.

Conte states that much of the melodic passages mentioned were not done intentionally. He states:

I had the harmonies, I then started making up an obbligato that [made] sense – that [had] the rhythmic characters associated right with triplets and ties... I think all these things [are] done also intuitively, at least by me in this piece.<sup>59</sup>

### *Rhythm*

Two rhythmic ideas are featured in *Veni Creator*. The first of these is the almost constant presence of quarter notes in the accompaniment. The quarter note

<sup>59</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

movement is typically found in the second piano and contrabass, and often in the harp. With few exceptions, the composer uses 3/4 meter in the entire work.

Exceptions occur at m. 67, mm. 89–90, and from mm. 109 to the end.

Syncopation also occurs throughout the movement. The introduction and instrumental interludes feature syncopation in the piano and percussion parts (see mm. 1–3, 35–38, 57–58, etc.). In section D the vibraphone provides a syncopated ostinato-like role throughout the section (see Example 8 above). Also worthy of note is the frequent use of triplets (including hemiolas) throughout the piece, both in the melodic voice and accompaniment.

#### *Text*

William “Bliss” Carman (1861–1929) was a Canadian-born poet remembered chiefly for poignant love poems and several prose works on nature, art and the human personality.<sup>60</sup> Although his religious preference is not commonly known, it seems his setting of *Veni Creator* was inspired by the Latin hymn of the same name.<sup>61</sup> The traditional Catholic hymn and Carman’s poem share the same title, yet few similarities exist in regards to meter, tone or mood between the two. The Latin hymn is one of continual praise and adoration, while Carman’s setting focuses on the role of the individual working in accordance to God’s will.

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<sup>60</sup> *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. “Carman, (William) Bliss.”

<sup>61</sup> David Conte, interview with author, June 29, 2010.

*Veni Creator* is comprised of sixteen stanzas set in two sections.<sup>62</sup> The first ten stanzas comprise section one, and were used in this musical setting, with textual adjustments made by Conte. Conte's variations on Carman's text included elimination of some stanzas and changing the setting to account for multiple voices speaking the text (i.e. "we") as opposed to an individual voice (i.e. "I"). The following table shows Section I of Carman's original text on the left, and the portion of the poem set by Conte on the right, with his alterations underlined (See Table 5 below).

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<sup>62</sup> Bliss Carman, "*Veni Creator*," *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1917. [www.bartleby.com/236/](http://www.bartleby.com/236/). (accessed October 29, 2010).

Table 5. Poetry Comparison – *Veni Creator*

Stanza	Original verse	Conte adaptation
1	LORD of the grass and hill, Lord of the rain, White Overlord of will, Master of pain,	Lord of the grass and hill, Lord of the rain, <u>Strong</u> overlord of will, Master of pain,
2	I who am dust and air Blown through the halls of death, Like a pale ghost of prayer, — I am thy breath.	<u>We who are</u> dust and air Blown through the halls of death, Like a pale ghost of prayer,— <u>We are</u> thy breath.
3	Lord of the blade and leaf, Lord of the bloom, Sheer Overlord of grief, Master of doom,	Lord of the blade and leaf, Lord of the bloom, Sheer Overlord of grief, Master of doom,
4	Lonely as wind or snow, Through the vague world and dim, Vagrant and glad I go; I am thy whim.	Lonely as wind or snow, Through the vague world and dim, Vagrant and glad <u>we</u> go; <u>We are</u> thy whim.
5	Lord of the storm and lull, Lord of the sea, I am thy broken gull, Blown far alee.	
6	Lord of the harvest dew, Lord of the dawn, Star of the paling blue Darkling and gone,	Lord of the harvest dew, Lord of the dawn, Star of the paling blue Darkling and gone,
7	Lost on the mountain height Where the first winds are stirred, Out of the wells of night I am thy word.	Lost on the mountain height Where the first winds are stirred, Out of the wells of night <u>We are</u> thy word.

Stanza	Original verse	Conte adaptation
8	Lord of the haunted hush, Where raptures throng, I am thy hermit thrush, Ending no song.	
9	Lord of the frost and cold, Lord of the North, When the red sun grows old And day goes forth,	Lord of the frost and cold, Lord of the North, When the red sun grows old And day goes forth,
10	I shall put off this girth,— Go glad and free, Earth to my mother earth, Spirit to thee.	<u>We</u> shall put off this girth,— Go glad and free Earth to our mother earth, Spirit to thee.

Section E (mm. 92–136) reveals the greatest textual and musical climaxes of the movement, highlighted by greater presence, activity and dynamic level of accompanimental forces (mm. 106–118) followed by near absence of accompaniment altogether (mm. 119–128). Measures 105–109 mark a major point of arrival, where there is a crescendo on the text “When the red sun grows old And the day goes forth,” followed by the harp entrance, and a florid saxophone line. Furthermore, the choir transitions from unison to four part harmony on the word “forth.” The combined effort results in a feeling of all of these instruments and voices literally going forth. This demonstration of energy is in preparation for the ultimate climax of the movement (mm. 111–117) in union with the words “We shall put off this girth.” Here, parts build to fortissimo dynamics, and there is a

sudden flurry of sixteenth notes in the harp and piano, underlying the triumphant chord in the chorus and the soaring obbligato line of the saxophone. This climax also prepares for greater attention to the text in mm. 119–128, noted by the stark reduction of accompaniment therein.

Those portions of the text that are intended to stand out were made obvious by Conte in his setting. The most consistent use of textual emphasis is at the end of every section, where Conte adapted the text from singular possessive to plural possessive. Furthermore, he sets the text to a four-part choral texture, providing dramatic closure to each section. The first occurrence is in mm. 32–34 on the text “We are thy breath” (see Example 6 above), the second in mm. 54–56 on “We are thy whim,” and the third on “We are thy word” (mm. 83–85).

#### Mariner’s Carol

*Mariner’s Carol* is the third movement of *American Triptych* and features the poetry of William Stanley Merwin (W.S. Merwin). Conte sees the poem as a metaphor of a sea journey expressing a ‘spiritual journey’ toward wholeness.<sup>63</sup> In this setting he incorporates minimalist rhythmic textures in seeking to create a calm and expectant mood.<sup>64</sup> Like *Veni Creator*, this seven and a half minute work is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, percussion, harp, piano four-hands, contrabass and solo soprano saxophone.

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<sup>63</sup> David Conte, *American Triptych*, text by e.e. cummings, W.S. Merwin and Bliss Carman. Composer’s notes to unpublished score, 1999.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

*Mariner's Carol* was inspired by the berceuse, a genre identified as a lullaby or an instrumental composition, or a character piece for piano.<sup>65</sup> Its most notable characteristics are compound time, a quiet dynamic level, a tonic pedal bass and a 'rocking' accompaniment.<sup>66</sup> *Mariner's Carol* is related to the berceuse primarily through the use of compound meter and the accompanimental rocking motion. Of these two characteristics, the rocking motion is more prominent, and is found primarily in the piano, harp and vibraphone (mm. 1–23, 136–158). The movement contains a significant amount of compound meter, but major sections are found in duple (mm. 21–56) and mixed meter (mm. 96–129) as well.

### *Structure*

In *Mariner's Carol* Conte returns to the associative format of stanza sections, similar to those found in *i thank You God*, designing the formal structure of the music in correlation with the poetic stanzas. The piece begins with an instrumental introduction, followed by five stanza-sections, each separated by instrumental interludes. The piece closes with a cadenza-like setting for double-chorus.

The main distinguishing factors determining each stanza-section are the way in which the composer sets each stanza, and the similar approach to each

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<sup>65</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev., edited by Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e1112> (accessed January 21, 2011), s.v. "Berceuse."

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth L. Hamilton, "Berceuse." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/grove/music/02749> (accessed January 21, 2011).

setting of “O star, shine before us!” The poetry is shown below with Merwin’s own format, punctuation and italics.

So still the night swinging,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
 Only the bows seethe to lap us,  
 Stays and wake whispering,  
 The thin bell striking,  
 And our hearts in their blindness.  
*O star, shine before us!*

The serpent’s deep sliding,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
 Is everywhere around us,  
 Heaves under us, gliding;  
 We know its toothed curling  
 The whole world encircles.  
*O star, shine before us!*

Crushed in its drag and keeping,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
 The darkened dead have no peace,  
 World-without-end shifting;  
 All, all are there, and no resting,  
 It exults above their faces.  
*O star, shine before us!*

The horizon’s perfect ring,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
 None enters nor ever has.  
 And we, like a cradle, rocking:  
 For the first glimpse of our homing  
 We roll and are restless.  
*O star, shine before us!*



Till, heaven and earth joining,  
*Wind of our faring,*  
 It is born to us  
 Like the first line of dawn breaking;  
 For that word and sight yearning  
 We keep the long watches.  
*O star, shine before us!*<sup>67</sup>

The instrumental interludes separating each stanza-section also provide a transition between differing tonal centers. As noted in the poetry above, there are two burdens, or recurring lines, in each stanza.<sup>68</sup> The second, “*O star, shine before us!*” is consistently set apart by reduced orchestration, and is stated as at the conclusion of every stanza-section of this composition.

The formal structure of *Mariner’s Carol* is shown in Table 6, and features the measures of each structural event with its salient feature(s) and function.

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<sup>67</sup> William Stanley Merwin, *The First Four Books of Poems*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2000.

<sup>68</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., s.v. “Burden”

Table 6. Formal Structure – *Mariner's Carol*.

Measures	Section	Function/Feature
<u>1–28</u>	<u>stanza-section 1 – (A)</u>	
1–6	instrumental introduction	berceuse effect introduced
7–27	choral presence	presentation of text
27–28	II – 1	
<u>29–63</u>	<u>stanza-section 2 – (B)</u>	
29–32	II – 1 continued	
33–63	choral presence	presentation of text
<u>63–98</u>	<u>stanza-section 3 – (C)</u>	
63–71	II – 2	
72–95	choral presence	presentation of text by tenor/bass
96–98	II – 3	
<u>99–135</u>	<u>stanza-section 4 – (D)</u>	
99–102	II – 3 continued	
103–127	choral presence	presentation of text by soprano/alto
126–135	II – 4	
<u>136–163</u>	<u>stanza-section 5 – (E)</u>	
136–139	II – 4 continued	
139–163	choral presence	presentation of text
<u>164–178</u>	<u>cadenza</u>	
164–178	choral presence	double-chorus setting

II = instrumental interlude

The accompanimental figures employed in a given stanza-section are introduced in the interludes (and introduction). Two examples are found in stanza-sections one and two. The rocking motion reflective of the berceuse is

initiated in mm. 1–6 in the percussion, harp, and both piano parts, and continues throughout the entirety of Stanza-Section One. Similarly, the first instrumental interlude introduces a repetitive accompanimental figure in the second piano part which continues throughout the second stanza-section (see Example 12 below).



Example 12. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 29–30, piano.

This use of multiple sections defined by specific rhythmic or harmonic figures is one of the unifying elements of the piece.

### *Texture*

A homophonic choral presence is the primary focus of *Mariner's Carol*. Stanza-sections one, two, and five all feature four-part choral writing, with occasional divisi. In addition to basic homophony, Stanza-Section Two also includes SA-TB voice pairing (mm. 33–57). Stanza-Section Three (mm. 63–98) features the men in a four-part split, and Stanza-Section Four (mm. 98–135) sets women's voices in a similar manner. In the cadenza (mm. 164–178) Conte repeats "O star, shine before us" with an SSAA, TTBB double chorus texture—a direct

reference to the double chorus ending from *Neptune*, of Gustav Holst's *The Planets*.<sup>69</sup>

In this movement the percussion, piano and harp take on a more unified role than in either *i thank You God* or *Veni Creator*. As mentioned earlier, they all contribute to the rocking figures reflective of a berceuse (see Example 13 below).

Moderately, with great calm ♩. = 60

Perc. I Vibes (medium yarn mallets) (motor off) *p*

Perc. II Marimba (soft yarn mallets) *pp* *p*

Perc. III

Harp *mp* (F major)

Piano Four-hands *p*

Example 13. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 1–3.

The contrabass often doubles other instruments in the presentation of pedal tones or other extended chords. The contrabass reinforcement of pedal tones is

<sup>69</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

seen in mm. 29–38 (marimba), and mm. 82–90 (piano). In doubling the piano and percussion (primarily marimba), the contrabass aids in providing tonal stability as demonstrated in mm. 1–23, 136–158.

In this movement the soprano saxophone has a more subdued role compared to its use in *Veni Creator*. Its primary role in the first two stanza-sections of the movement is to either echo or ‘comment’ on the choral statements preceding it (see mm. 25–28, 39–41, and 43–47). In mm. 54–159 the saxophone is given a more active line, especially during instrumental interludes two and four, where it is given the melody. During these interludes, it is in the foreground and the other instrumental forces are reduced (see mm. 65–72, 127–137). At other times the soprano saxophone doubles and/or embellishes chorus parts (see mm 177–178 and Example 14 below).

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves: the top staff is for the Soprano Saxophone (S. Sax) and the bottom staff is for the Soprano voice (S.). Both staves begin with a *cresc.* marking. The S. Sax staff features a melodic line with a slur over the first four notes and a '4' below the final note. The S. staff has lyrics: 'watch' followed by a dash, 'es.' followed by a dash, and 'O' followed by a '2' below the final note. The second system also has two staves: S. Sax on top and S. on the bottom. Both start at measure 157. The S. Sax staff has a *ff* dynamic marking at the beginning and a *mf* marking later. The S. staff has a *ff* dynamic marking at the beginning and a *mf* marking later. The S. staff has the lyric 'star,' under the first note.

Example 14. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 154–159, soprano saxophone and soprano.

Five additional instruments are part of the accompanimental texture of *Mariner's Carol* as well, including the celesta, triangle, suspended cymbal, bass drum and glockenspiel. Each of these instruments is used infrequently, and for very specific effects. Of the five, the triangle has the greatest presence (mm. 100–123). The bass drum and suspended cymbal have three passages between the two of them (see mm. 89–90, 123–124, 137–138), while the celesta and glockenspiel are presented only in the last nine measures of the movement.

### *Tonal Organization*

In keeping with the berceuse influence, *Mariner's Carol* is imbued with pedal tones.<sup>70</sup> Although tonic pedals are traditionally a feature of the berceuse, Conte uses both tonic and dominant pedals, and repeating harmonic patterns to solidify harmonic events. The role of pedal tones in establishing tonal centers cannot be over-emphasized, and they can be found throughout the piece (see mm. 29–34, 68–72, 99–122).

Additionally, Conte uses repeated harmonic patterns to define or organize a tonal area. The opening figure in the second piano and contrabass parts display a harmonic progression of  $i^6 - v - IV$ , which Conte states is more typically found in

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<sup>70</sup> Kenneth L. Hamilton, "Berceuse." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/grove/music/02749> (accessed January 21, 2011).

a chaconne.<sup>71</sup> The first occurrence of this progression is found in Example 15 below.

Piano Four-hands

*p*

Moderately, with great calm ♩. = 60

Contrabass

*pizz.*

*p*

Example 15. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 1–3.

Ostinati are also used to repeat a given harmony and to supply tonal stability, and are found throughout the piece. The initial ostinati statements are presented in mm. 1–3 (vibraphone, piano, harp), mm. 29–30 (harp, piano), mm. 99–100, 136–137 (harp, piano).

Conte's *Mariner's Carol* frequently modulates through various modes, keys and tonal centers. At times, entire sections are centered in one key/mode, while others sections modulate and move from one tonal center to another rather quickly.

This movement contains several passages focused on a given tonal center while moving freely between keys and/or modes associated with that center. For instance, Stanza-Section One starts in D Dorian (mm. 1–14) then shifts to D minor (mm. 15–28), but is all presented within the context of D. Likewise, Stanza-

<sup>71</sup> David Conte, interview with author, January 2011.

Section Three (mm. 76–90) is centered on D with free interchange of D major and D Mixolydian occurring with the substitutions of C# and C natural. A comparable occurrence comes in Stanza-Section Five (mm. 136–163) emphasizing moments of both G minor and G major.

In addition to quickly changing tonal centers, the use of pan-triadicism and extended chords create complicated harmonies that may blur the clarity of a tonal center. For example, Conte maintains that mm. 58–63 is all in Ab major, (moving from the enharmonic g# minor in the preceding measures); therefore the presence of Eb supports a dominant function over the course of the five measures.<sup>72</sup>

Measure 58, however, clearly presents Db and C triads in the vocal parts. The same pan-triadic approach is used in the vocal parts of m. 59 as well, all over a dominant Eb pedal tone (see Example 16 below).

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



The image shows a musical score for five voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The lyrics are "star, O star, shine be -". The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The Soprano, Alto, and Tenor parts have a melodic line with a fermata over the first "star," and a second "star," followed by "shine be -". The Bass and Contrabass parts have a more rhythmic line with a fermata over the first "star," and a second "star," followed by "shine be -". The Contrabass part includes dynamic markings: *f*, *mp*, and *ff*.

Example 16. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 58–59.

As part of the same  $A_b$  passage, the use of extended chords is made apparent in m. 62. The basses assume the  $E_b$  pedal, with an apparent  $B_b$  minor chord in the other choral parts. Yet, in consideration of Conte's use of extended chords, it can be analyzed as a  $V^9$  chord, with no third (see mm. 62–63 of Example 17 below).

Example 17. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 60–63, saxophone and SATB voices.

The following table represents the various tonal centers of the piece with corresponding measures and sections, and notable harmonic events and reflects many views of the composer as detailed in interviews.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

Table 7. Tonal Organization – *Mariner's Carol*.

Tonal Center	Measures	Section	Notable Events
D Dorian/ minor	1–27 27–28	SS 1 II 1	
F Lydian	29–32 32–39	II 1 SS 2	tonic pedal
F# minor	40–45	SS2	
G# minor	46–57	SS 2	tonic pedal
Ab major	58–63	SS 2	dominant pedal
transition	63–67	II 2	enharmonic Db pedal (third of B minor)
B minor	68–71	II 2	
B minor	72–75	SS 3	
D major/Mixolydian	76–89	SS 3	
G major	87–95	SS 3	
F major	96–98	II 3	tonic pedal
Eb major	99–102	II 3	dominant pedal
Eb major	103–127	SS 4	dominant pedal (mm. 103–110) tonic pedal (mm. 111–122)
transition	127–135	II 4	
G minor/major	135–139 139–163	II 4 SS 5	
C Lydian	164–178	cadenza	dominant pedal

SS = stanza-section

II = instrumental interlude

### Melody

The primary source for melodic material is found in the choir, with the core melodic ideas of each stanza-section always presented by the voices. The melodic idea connecting the melodies together is the musical contour, with nearly all melodies starting on a given note, followed by a leap or series of skips upward, and ending with a downward descent. This idea of contour is carried out in small melodic lines of 3–4 measures (see Example 18a below).



Example 18a. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 6–8, soprano voice.

It is also carried out over multiple smaller phrases with the opening figure rising, and the closing interval(s) descending (see Example 18b below).

World with out end \_\_\_ shift \_\_\_ ting \_\_\_

All \_\_\_ all are there and no rest - ing. \_\_\_

Example 18b. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 79–84, tenor voice.

*Mariner's Carol* contains additional melodic events are presented by the obbligato soprano saxophone. Stanza-Section Four features includes a counter-melody in the soprano saxophone, first marked by skips (mm. 103–107), then by stepwise motion (mm. 108–123). Stanza-Section Five contains a saxophone part which acts as a fifth vocal line with the SATB choir (see mm. 144–159 and Example 14 above).

The soprano saxophone also presents predominantly stepwise melodic ideas during instrumental interludes number two and four as played in mm. 65–72 and 127–137. Conte incorporates occasional skips in both examples while achieving the desired contour; a rising, then falling line in interlude two, and a nearly continual rising line in interlude four. The pattern describing instrumental interludes two and four are not consistent with the rest of the piece, however, since the saxophone part has little melodic consistency in reference to the entire composition.

### *Rhythm*

The basic rhythmic unit of this movement is borne out of the compound meter which prevails throughout the piece. The triple pulse per beat provides the rhythmic drive and berceuse-like feel that permeates *Mariner's Carol*. The 'rocking' effect and rhythmic interest comes from the use of syncopated tied and quarter notes alternating with eighth rests in the berceuse rhythm (see Example 13 above).

*Mariner's Carol* and *i thank You God* are similar in respect to the use of mixed meter. Although mixed meter does not permeate movement III as it does movement I, Conte utilizes mixed meter in *Mariner's Carol* to accommodate the prosody. By so doing, he emphasizes specific words and syllables in the text (see Example 19 below and mm. 146–152). At other times, the use of mixed meter is constantly shifting to accent different beats of shifting duple (6/8) and triple (3/4) meter as in mm.99–121.

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a mixed meter. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 16-18) has lyrics: "The thin bell striking, and <sup>2</sup>our". The second system (measures 19-22) has lyrics: "hearts in <sup>2</sup>their blind - ness.". The meter shifts between 6/8 and 3/4. The lyrics are: "The thin bell striking, and <sup>2</sup>our hearts in <sup>2</sup>their blind - ness.".

Example 19. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 16–22.

*Text*

The poetic form reveals two burdens, or repeated lines that, in the printed poem, do not share the same left justification as the rest of the stanzas, but are indented. In Conte's composition, the first burden, "Wind of our faring," is never set at the downbeat of a measure, just as the line is never left-justified in the poetry. The second burden, "O star, shine before us," is set in a manner of word painting. At each occurrence throughout the piece, the orchestration is either reduced or eliminated, suggesting the star's self-sustaining heavenly light (see Example 20 below).

The image shows a page of a musical score for David Conte's *Mariner's Carol*, measures 89-93. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with vocal parts at the top and instrumental parts below. The vocal parts (I and II) are in treble and bass clefs, respectively, with lyrics written below the notes. The instrumental parts include Piano (I, II, III), Harp (Hp.), and Cello (Cb.). The score features various dynamics such as *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *pp* (pianissimo). There are also performance markings like *Lg. Susp. Cym.* (Large Suspended Cymbal) and *(yarn mallets)* for the harp. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes a rehearsal mark 'J' in a box at measure 89.

Example 20. David Conte, *Mariner's Carol*, mm. 89–93.

Another example of word painting comes on the words “shifting” (mm. 80–81). Here he emphasizes the off-beat, or syncopated rhythm in accordance with a change of meter to ‘shift’ the rhythmic feel of the line. This is also one of the few moments where Conte uses melismatic writing. Thus, he is also ‘shifting’ from the predominantly syllabic setting of this text to a short melismatic moment.



Incidentally, not all punctuation marks were carried over from Merwin's poem to Conte's score. Conte eliminates semi-colons (mm. 49–50, 81), eliminates hyphens in “world-without-end,” (m. 79), and replaces a comma with a period after “resting” (m. 83).

### The Nine Muses

*The Nine Muses* is a through-composed composition based on the poetry of John Stirling Walker. It was the ACDA 2007 Raymond W. Brock Memorial commission and is scored for SSAATTBB choir, SATB soli, piano four-hands, and percussion. The premiere was conducted by Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe on March 8, 2007, at the ACDA National Conference in Miami, Florida. Performance of *The Nine Muses* takes approximately 15 minutes.

Each year the ACDA Executive Committee commissions a recognized composer to write a choral composition in an effort to perpetuate and encourage the creation of quality choral repertoire.<sup>74</sup> Certain guidelines are provided for the Brock Memorial commission, and are therefore relevant in this discussion of the piece. The guidelines are as follows:<sup>75</sup>

1. Compositions that have a sacred text are preferred, however it is not required that the text come from the Bible.
2. Compositions that use voices are preferred.
3. The music must be substantial and accessible.

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<sup>74</sup> American Choral Directors Association, “The Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission.” [http://acda.org/archive/brock\\_pieces](http://acda.org/archive/brock_pieces) (accessed February 11, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

4. The music must be of a kind and quality that will live and last for a long period of time.

5. All commissioned compositions will be performed publicly for the first time at a National or Division Conference of the American Choral Directors Association.

In order to find a text for this honorable commission, Conte chose to collaborate with John Stirling Walker. Conte's original thoughts were to write something about war, and then Walker suggested he compose something about the art of music, thus leading to the topic of the Muses.<sup>76</sup>

Walker has a long standing interest in Greek civilization and the sensibility that can be associated with the myths and legends of that culture.<sup>77</sup> The Muses originate from Greek mythology as the daughters of Zeus, each ruling over a certain art or science.<sup>78</sup> During July of 2007 Conte and Walker discussed their ideas and intentions of using the Muses as a topic for the commissioned work, and Conte composed *The Nine Muses* in August and September of the same year.<sup>79</sup>

Conte states that he was inspired to write a work about the 'Transfiguring' power of art, and that his challenge was to compose a single-movement work that

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<sup>76</sup> David Conte, interview with author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

<sup>77</sup> John Stirling Walker, phone interview with author, February 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Littleton, C. Scott. "Muses." *World Book Online Reference Center*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2061/pl/referencecenter/article?id=ar378540&st=muses> (accessed February 14 2011).

<sup>79</sup> John Stirling Walker, phone interview with author, February 2011.

would hold together as one thought from beginning to end.<sup>80</sup> Each of the Muses were set in a specific order to create a sense of drama, of unfolding colors, feelings, dynamics and thoughts, and to have an organic relationship one to another.<sup>81</sup> As part of this unfolding, Conte provided a unique character for each Muse through the use of choral and vocal solo, and instrumental textures, with the piece still holding together as one thought from beginning to end.<sup>82</sup>

### *Structure*

*The Nine Muses* is associative music, and is a through-composed work. The structural basis of the composition is the poem, which is set to nine stanza-sections. The work contains instrumental interludes, as well as opening and closing sections functioning like a prelude and postlude, and two climactic moments.<sup>83</sup>

The overarching structural element of the music is found in the organization of the ‘stanza-section,’ as seen in his earlier compositions. In contrast to *American Triptych*, however, the stanza-sections are not identified or set apart by consistent musical events such as melody, dynamics, or the scoring of voices and instruments. Instead, the common factors establishing each individual

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<sup>80</sup> David Conte, *Composer’s Notes - The Nine Muses*, poem by John Stirling Walker (E.C. Schirmer Company: Boston, 2007): Catalog num. 6787.

<sup>81</sup> John Stirling Walker, phone interview with author, February 2011.

<sup>82</sup> David Conte, *Composer’s Notes - The Nine Muses*, poem by John Stirling Walker (E.C. Schirmer Company: Boston, 2007): 80.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

each stanza-section in *The Nine Muses* are instrumental interludes, and the text reflecting each poetic stanza as identified in the score by the composer with Roman numerals. The poem is set in its entirety as follows:<sup>84</sup>

### The Nine Muses

#### We Sing the Muses

##### I. Music

For the sake of all that sings  
 Bring we mighty, glorious things:  
 Things of marvel, things of splendor  
 Things no mortal finds an end for.

##### II. Dance

For the sake of all that dances  
 Will we gracious motion, glances  
 Fervent, hearts on fire,  
 All that lifts the body higher.

##### III. History

For the sake of all that marches  
 Onward, forward, through the arches  
 Of historical conditions,  
 Make we light of prohibitions.

##### IV. Astronomy and Astrology

For the sake of heavenly cycles,  
 Planets coursing under Michael's  
 Brilliant, shining solar power,  
 Say we: "Look, it is the hour."

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

## V. Tragedy

For the sake of tragic tales  
 That deepen, feelingly, travail's  
 Strong hold on human minds,  
 Write we forthwith much that binds.

## VI. Sacred Poetry

Bound to virtue, bound to truth,  
 Bound to beauty, yea, forsooth,  
 For the sake of all that honors,  
 Yield we up the Sacred.

## VII. Comedy

Dawn pours out Her holy light  
 Upon mankind in its plight.  
 As we lighten mankind's load,  
 For the sake of humor bold.

## VIII. Epic Poetry

Epic grandeur is the lot  
 We take upon our shoulders, not  
 By dint, merely, of fashion,  
 But imbued with daring passion.

## IX. Lyric Poetry

For it is the courage-filled  
 Who shall bring man's power, killed  
 By theory, killed by lace,  
 Into lyric beauty's forms, now filled with grace.

For reasons of clarity and convenience in the following discussion of *The Nine Muses*, stanza-sections will be labeled by either the name of the Muse, the Roman numerals listed in the poetry above, or both.

The introduction and closing sections of the work are based on the music used in the opening line of the poem, "We Sing the Muses." They are closely related, with textual repetition based on the same melodic idea. Another important

structural moment related to the introduction is the return of the accompanimental figure from the introduction directly after the first climax (see Example 21 below).<sup>85</sup>

The image displays two musical staves for Percussion 1 and Percussion 2, and two grand piano staves (Primo and Secundo). The left page is in 2/4 time, and the right page is in 4/4 time. The Percussion parts feature Chimes and Timpani. The Piano parts are marked 'f sempre marcato' and 'mf'. The right page shows a change in dynamics to 'mf' for the Percussion and Piano parts.

Example 21. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, m.1, 192.

The similarities between the introduction, interlude and the closing, provide an overarching connection for the entire piece.

Although each stanza-section has moments where the vocalists are absent, there are only four structural instrumental interludes in *The Nine Muses*. In contrast to those found in *American Triptych* which contained material clearly

<sup>85</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, February 2011.

connected with a certain stanza-section or another, the four instrumental interludes found in *The Nine Muses* contain melodic and/or thematic material functioning as a separate entity, and are labeled as instrumental interlude 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Table 8 below.

The following table presents the major sections of *The Nine Muses*, including stanza-sections, instrumental interludes, with their corresponding measures. The prominent features of each major section are also listed.

Table 8. Formal Structure – *The Nine Muses*

Measures	Section	Event	Function/Feature
1–14	A	introduction	prelude
15–38	B	stanza-section I	I. Music
38–53		instrumental interlude 1	piano solo
54–123	C	stanza-section II	II. Dance
124–133		instrumental interlude 2	piano solo
134–157	D	stanza-section III	III. History – TTBB
157–192	E	stanza-section IV	IV. Astronomy and Astrology – SSAA/alto 2 soli
192–196		instrumental interlude 3	uses accompanimental figure from A
197–231	F	stanza-section V	V. Tragedy – alto soloist/TTBB chorus
231–252	G	stanza-section VI	VI. Sacred Poetry – soprano soloist
252–265	H	stanza-section VII	VII. Comedy – tenor soloist
266–294	I	stanza-section VIII	VIII. Epic Poetry – uses fugato
295–308		instrumental interlude 4	piano solo
309–327	J	stanza-section IX	XI. Lyric Poetry – bass soloist/ solo soprano & solo bass duet
327–336	A <sup>1</sup>	Closing	postlude/full choir and SATB soli

### *Texture*

*The Nine Muses* is scored for SATB soli, SATB chorus (divisi), percussion and piano four-hands, and its texture is marked by the use of choral, solo vocal and instrumental writing in order to provide contrast and to express the unique



character of each Muse. Thus Conte uses contrasting forces to create interest, and he varies the voicing of the choir (SSA,SATB,TTB., etc.) for expression, and often employs the voices in eight parts. The introduction incorporates SATB divisi (eight parts) in layered/imitative entrances, and then continues in eight-part homophony. Comparable eight-part writing is found in stanza-sections I, II, and VI. Four-part writing is also common throughout the composition. Stanza-section VIII utilizes four-part SATB writing, while stanza-sections III and IV are written for four-part TTBB and SSAA, respectively.

This composition also calls for soprano, alto, tenor and bass soloists. The most common use of soloists in this piece is to set them simultaneously or alternating with the choir. Sections of alternating choir/soloist are found in stanza-sections V and VI. On other occasions, the featured soloist is singing in chorus with the choir as in the closing section and in stanza-section VI (mm. 249–252). Although these two approaches are most common, he also sets soloists apart, such as in stanza-section VII which is strictly a tenor solo, and stanza-section IX, a duet of bass and soprano soloists.

There are also select moments where the choir takes on an accompanimental role of its own in support of the soloists. This approach to the choral writing is found in stanza-section IV where the choir sings wordless syllables (mm. 157–172), and again accompanimental/supportive role with the soprano soloist in stanza-section VI with the text “yield we up” (mm. 240–245).

The accompaniment plays an extremely supportive role in this work, with piano four-hands in the forefront. The piano is present for nearly every measure of the piece, with only seven combined measures in tacit (see mm. 16–17, 150–151, 250–251, 336). Those seven measures also represent the only time the choir and/or soloists sing unaccompanied during the entire work. These moments draw greater focus to the choral writing, and prepare the ear for a new accompanimental idea.

The piano four-hands part occupies numerous roles from beginning to end. The piano provides the tonal stability of the entire work, and is the backdrop that increases interest to the choral parts in many other ways. The piano often doubles vocal parts (at pitch level or octave displacement), as in mm. 32–34, 173–179, 222–223. Sustained tones are another primary function of the piano part, both in the form of sustained chords (mm. 2–3, 54–60, 102–105, 180–184) and pedal tones (see mm. 5–31, 267–293, 309–316); both sustained tone functions are most commonly found in the piano secundo part. This approach was also seen in some of the earlier works discussed.

As the primary instrument used to evoke different moods associated with the Muses, the piano also provides a major melodic and rhythmic role. During stanza-section II the piano introduces a countermelody in mm. 56–57, 60–62, with multiple subsequent statements of the countermelody played by the piano and xylophone (see Example 22 below).

Example 22. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 61–63.

In stanza-section III the piano consistently presents eighth notes on every beat in mm. 134–148, providing rhythmic constancy and creating a ‘marching’ feel in association with the text. The piano also creates a similar effect of continual marching by doubling the timpani in mm. 192–218 (V. Tragedy) and mm. 267–291 (VIII. Epic Poetry), and later creates a lighter mood to portray Comedy through the use of syncopated sixty-fourth notes (mm. 252–265).

As mentioned previously, the piano often reinforces other percussion instruments and voices as in Examples 21 and 22. The piano is also to be used as a replacement when an instrument may be unavailable, such as in mm. 232–249, where the piano secundo replaces the marimba if it is not present. Although the piano doubles vocal lines occasionally, it is usually for only a measure or two at a time (see mm. 23–24, 27–28, 32–34).

Significant melodic moments for the accompaniment ensemble occur during the instrumental interludes. Once again, the piano is unparalleled in this

role, with instrumental interludes one, two and four composed as piano solos (see mm. 38–53, 124–133, 294–308). During the third instrumental interlude (mm. 192–196) the piano and percussion present the declamatory figure shown in Example 21 above.

The percussion ensemble includes ten instruments: xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, timpani, small bass drum, medium suspended cymbal, triangle and medium tam tam. Six percussion instruments are used numerous times throughout the piece, while the remaining four are used sparingly, namely the bass drum (m. 134), triangle (m. 186), marimba (m. 232) and tam tam (m. 286). The following table shows which percussion instruments are used in each major section.

Table 9. Percussion Usage – *The Nine Muses*

Section	Percussion instrument(s) used
introduction	chimes, timpani, glockenspiel, vibraphone
stanza-section I	glockenspiel, vibraphone
instrumental interlude 1	
stanza-section II	glockenspiel, xylophone
instrumental interlude 2	
stanza-section III	bass drum, glockenspiel, timpani
stanza-section IV	glockenspiel, vibraphone, cymbal, triangle , chimes
instrumental interlude 3	timpani, chimes
stanza-section V	timpani, chimes
stanza-section VI	marimba
stanza-section VII	glockenspiel, xylophone
stanza-section VIII	timpani, tam tam
instrumental interlude 4	
stanza-section IX	
closing	glockenspiel, vibraphone

Conte is also very specific in assigning how to play the particular instrument. Although many examples exist, some include instructions to dampen the small bass drum and strike in the center (see m. 134), and the use of various types of mallets or sticks on the pitched percussion throughout the piece (see mm. 10, 160, 175, 109, 231). Concerning the use of percussion in *The Nine Muses*, Conte states:

[In the percussion family] there's a whole range there of hardness and softness and brightness. If you are listening sensitively... there is a range of color and gradation, and that's what I'm trying to play with.

My philosophy is that percussion is effective in inverse ratio to its use – it wears out. It's very easy to over-write for percussion—it can end up sounding too 'jangly'—it stops giving information. But I tried to use it judiciously and for exactly what I needed.<sup>86</sup>

### *Tonal Organization*

Conte first conceived *The Nine Muses* starting and ending in the same key.

After collaborating with John Stirling Walker, however, he chose otherwise:

[John] had a really brilliant idea. I had originally ended the piece in the key it began in, and he said "I really suggest you consider moving it into a new, unexpected area because of the sense of the revelatory quality," and I rarely do that in my music. I usually end where I begin, for reasons of balance and just 'it's my instincts,' but in this case, the piece ends a half step higher than it started.<sup>87</sup>

Significant harmonic events found throughout the piece are consistently related to the dominant. These include the presence of dominant pedals, dominant extended chords, and musical points of arrival and/or cadences on the dominant.

The presence of pedal tones and/or sustained accompanimental tones are commonly found in this work, with a great portion of them occurring on the dominant (see mm. 54–64, 159–166, 167–179, 309–316, 327–335). An example

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<sup>86</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

<sup>87</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, February 2011.

of the tonal center being established through the dominant pedal is found in stanza-section IV (mm. 159–191), where the use of pedal point spans the stanza-section. The first is on B, solidifying the arrival in E major mm. 159, while the second pedal tone of Ab establishes the key of Db major (mm. 167–179).

The cadence at m. 178 demonstrates the use of a dominant extended chord. Analysis of the choral parts makes the chord appear to be a IV6 chord with an added sixth (Bb, Db, Eb, and Gb) over an Ab dominant pedal in the piano. However, Conte asserts that the chord is actually a V<sup>11</sup> chord on Ab with the third omitted and the Gb functioning as the added eleventh scale degree (see Example 23 below).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

178 *f*

S 1 *f* pow'r,

S 2 *f* pow'r,

A 1 *f* pow'r,

A 2 *f* pow'r,

Pno. *f*

Example 23. David Conte, *The Nine Muses: Piano/Vocal Score*, m. 178.

It is the use of arrivals on the dominant, as in the example shown above, that lends a sense of forward motion to the music. Conte compares this approach to the works of other composers, especially Wagner, stating:

[He is] constantly arriving on dominant pedals. They'll set up their dominant pedal and as soon as it arrives on that note (tonic) he introduces the seventh, which makes that chord immediately another dominant. And by doing that he is able to sustain these very long structures because he is never arriving, and he can keep all the tones active and alive and moving.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



In *The Nine Muses* there are only two strong arrivals on authentic cadences in the entire piece, occurring at m. 116 and m. 186. The piece actually ends on a dominant, for reasons he relates here:

In the case of this piece, it doesn't end on a strong cadence at all—it hangs in the air. [It creates] this feeling of eternity. It remains a question and an echo of space, and it's not bound to the earth. It's kind of heavenly—as is appropriate to the text. I hear it ending on the dominant which [makes it] open-ended... it's not earth bound.<sup>90</sup>

Conte frequently uses six or more diatonic pitches in chord structures, and occasionally during the work he makes free use of all seven scale degrees. Examples of these chords can be found in mm. 8–9, 60–62, 98, 292–293 and 332–333. Example 24 below demonstrates how he built a chord using every note in the A major scale. The imitative quartal entrances built in quartal fashion (with motivic variation) result in the diatonic chord in mm. 60–62.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



minor. For example, mm. 237–251 are set in D major, but fluctuates to D minor for just two measures in mm. 245–246. He also uses tonicization, which is used in a non-Schenkerian context to characterize modulation at a low level, where a new key is touched on only briefly.<sup>93</sup>

*The Nine Muses* contains musical segments where various harmonic events occur rapidly. A prime example is found in Stanza-Section II (mm. 54–117), where six distinct tonal areas can be found in the music. This example and others can be recognized in the table below, representing each of the tonal areas of *The Nine Muses*. The table is organized by each structural section, listing the tonal centers with their corresponding measures and other notable harmonic events found in that musical segment.

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<sup>93</sup>William Drabkin, “Tonicization.” In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://ezproxy.mylibrary.us:2120/subscriber/article/grove/music/28123> (accessed March 30, 2011).

Table 10. Tonal Organization – *The Nine Muses*.

Section	Tonal Center	Measures	Notable Events
introduction	Bb major	1–14	
stanza-section I	Bb major	15–38	Eb tonicization mm. 16–23.
instrumental interlude 1	G major	38–53	
stanza-section II	A major	54–73	
	G Lydian	74–91	
	C Aeolian	92–97	
	F Lydian w/ b7	98–105	
	Eb Major	106–109	
	A Aeolian	110–117	PAC in A major at m. 116.
instrumental interlude 2	transition	118–133	tonicizes A, D, B.
stanza-section III	E minor	134–158	cadence on C# major m. 157.
stanza-section IV	E major	159–166	
	Db major	167–179	use of Db pentatonic scale in m. 175.
	B major	180–185	
	Ab major	186–191	PAC at m. 186.
instrumental interlude 3	Bb minor	192–196	
stanza-section V	Bb minor	197–220	cadence on g# minor at m. 209. cadence on N <sup>6</sup> at m. 217.
	Eb minor	221–230	cadence on Eb major at m. 228.
stanza-section VI	Eb major	230–236	
	D major	237–251	D maj/min fluctuation mm. 245–246.
stanza-section VII	F mixolydian	252–261	
	Db major	262–266	
stanza-section VIII	Db major	266–294	cadence on bVI at m.292.
instrumental interlude 4	E major	295–308	
stanza-section IX	Transition	309–327	begins in Ab Mixolydian, and cadences on a B dominant 7 chord.
closing	B major	327–336	

### Melody

In its most basic form, melody is defined as the result of the interaction of rhythm and pitch. *The Nine Muses* contains no common, overarching melodic idea; instead, each stanza-section brings out melodic characteristics unique to each setting of the text.

It is the presence of various motives which provide thematic unity within a stanza-section, and that provide contrast throughout the piece. The opening and closing melodic idea of the entire piece is based on the setting of the text “We sing” (see Example 25 below).

Bass 1

*f*

We sing,

Example 25. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 1–2.

The primary melodic idea of Stanza-Section I features an arching contour, using leaps and steps that highlight the third, octave, and sixth. This is demonstrated by the first sopranos in mm. 15–19 (see Example 26 below), then elaborated and extended in mm. 19–27.

S

For the sake of all that sings \_\_\_\_\_

Example 26. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 15–19, Soprano 1-2.

Stanza-Section II (mm. 54–123) is based on two ideas, as seen below in Examples 27a and 27b, below.

A

55

*p*

Dance, \_\_\_\_\_

Example 27a. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 55–57, alto.

S

77

*f*

For the sake of all that danc - es \_\_\_\_\_

Example 27b. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 77–81, soprano.

The setting of text in Stanza-Section III is quite short, and no repetitive melodic development occurs. The thematic idea here is marked by short ideas,

separated by rests, and noted by the disjunct melodic line (see example 28 below).<sup>94</sup>

142 (unis.) mf  
T For the sake of all that march-es On - ward, for - ward,

Example 28. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 142–145, tenor.

Similar to the stanza-section preceding it, Stanza-Section IV (mm. 157–192) is completely through-composed with almost no text repetition. Five melodic ideas occur, introduced on the words “for the sake,” “Planets coursing,” “brilliant shining,” “say we,” and “look,” (see mm. 164–187).

The key motive in Stanza-Section V (mm. 197–231) is first seen with the words “tragic tales” in m. 201 (see Example 29 below), and becomes a unifying factor within the stanza-section, both rhythmically and melodically.

201  
A Solo  
trag - ic tales,

Example 29. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, m. 201, alto solo.

<sup>94</sup> Jan Larue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2008), 85.

Stanza-Section VI has two motivic ideas. The first is presented by the soprano soloist in rising intervals of a third, then a fourth, and is the foundation of the soloist's melody in mm. 238–247 (see Example 30 below).

S  
Solo

237

*mp*

Bound to vir - tue, \_\_\_

Example 30. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, m. 237–239, soprano solo.

The second motivic idea is the stepwise motion to a third, and is sung by the chorus. The first presentation is by the sopranos and altos in mm. 240–241, it is then inverted in the men's part found in mm. 241–242. The apex of Stanza-Section VI is built upon this melodic idea, presented in contrary motion (see Example 31 below).



249 *molto allarg.* *p* *mf*

S Solo yield we up the Sa - cred.

S yield we up the Sa - cred.

A yield we up the Sa - cred.

T yield we up the Sa - cred.

B yield we up the Sa - cred.

Example 31. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 249–251.

The melodic material in Stanza-Section VII (mm. 252–265) is found in a tenor solo. In this short melodic presentation Conte constructs two four-bar phrases whose lines are comparable to one another (see mm. 255–264).

Stanza-Section VIII (mm. 266–294) is a non-modulating fugue, or fugato.<sup>95</sup> The melody is introduced by the tenors on the third scale degree, the altos on tonic, and then sopranos on the third and basses on tonic (see mm. 267–286). The original fugue subject is set to the text “Epic grandeur is the lot we take upon our

<sup>95</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, February 2011.

shoulders, not by dint, merely of fashion,” with slight variations incorporated into the bass, alto and soprano lines starting on the word “shoulders.”

Stanza-Section IX (mm. 309–327) is relatively short, and is an example of through-composed melodic writing set for two soloists. The melodic contour of mm. 312–314 loosely resembles the melody that completes the rest of the stanza-section.

### *Rhythm*

Similar to the discussion on melody, no commonality of rhythmic cells or groupings between the stanza-sections exists in *The Nine Muses*. Each rhythmic idea is reminiscent of the Muse it is associated with, and is incorporated into the melodic ideas discussed in the preceding section.

It can be stated generally, however, that Conte uses a variety of rhythmic devices to achieve musical expression in *The Nine Muses*. The opening and closing figures “We sing” (mm. 1–3, 5–8) contains a rapid succession of eighth notes that result in a buoyant and light expression of singing. Stanza-Section II is portrayed through a nearly-continuous stream of eighth notes by either the chorus or accompaniment to the same effect (mm. 58–123). In contrast, a solemn feel is attained by the consistent eighth notes on nearly every beat of Stanza-Section III, depicting “all that marches” (mm. 134–149). The accompaniment in Stanza-Section IV (mm. 160–189) aids in creating an ethereal, heavenly background by the recurring use of sextuplets. The idea of tragedy is fashioned through the use of

alternating quarter-quarter-half rhythmic cells (and variations) in Stanza-Section V as found in Example 32 below.

Prim.

Sec.

(8<sup>me</sup>)

Example 32. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 201–202.

Conte also uses shifting rhythmic figures when approaching a cadence (or other musical point of arrival) through hemiola, syncopation, or at times, mixed meter. The dominant cadence in m. 98 is preceded by hemiola (see Example 33 below).

96 *mp* hearts on fire, *f*

S

*mp* hearts on fire, *f*

A

*mp* hearts on fire, *f*

T

*mp* hearts on fire, *f*

B

Example 33. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 96–98.

The end of Stanza-Section VI (Sacred Poetry) reflects both the use of syncopated rhythms and mixed meter in preparation for the climactic moment of the Stanza-Section. Tied notes in the vocal lines create rhythmic ambiguity, and increased rhythmic tension and anticipation, amplified by the inserted measure of 3/4 time in approaching the word “Sacred” (see Example 31 above).

Stanza-Section VII has two noteworthy rhythmic ideas. The first is the change in meter signaling the musical high point in mm. 285–292. The second idea is the constant Db quarter-note pedal presented by the timpani and piano. The repeated Db timpani throughout the stanza-section is reminiscent of the last 36 measures of Brahms *Requiem*, Movement 3 (*Herr, lehre doch mich*).<sup>96</sup> At the same time the piano is doubling the timpani with a three-note ostinato in 4/4 meter (mm. 267–287). This pattern by the piano is altered during the change to mixed

<sup>96</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, February 2011.

meter approaching the cadence, first by becoming a two-note pattern, then doubling duration in syncopation (mm. 288–292).

### *Text*

*The Nine Muses* emerged from Conte's desire to write a work about the 'Transfiguring' power of art.<sup>97</sup> He sees the poem as one organic thought, one argument with nine words, or an argument with nine elements.<sup>98</sup>

Walker states that the poetry was borne out of ideals of form and beauty that he and David had been discussing for thirty years. The conductor who premiered the work found the text evasive and difficult to understand, especially with regards to the poet's voice.<sup>99</sup> Conte verifies the potential difficulty in comprehending the text, stating:

The text is not an esoteric text, and it is not easily understood by people, but it's a great text I think. I don't know how many people really understand Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, either. It's got a density to it that is not in poetry now really; a very nineteenth century kind of sensibility.<sup>100</sup>

Walker indicated that the text is set as though the Muses were speaking of their efforts to help mankind, and the 'mighty, glorious' things they offer in

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<sup>97</sup> David Conte, *Composer's Notes - The Nine Muses*, poem by John Stirling Walker (E.C. Schirmer Company: Boston, 2007).

<sup>98</sup> David Conte, email to author, February 7, 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Dr. Jo-Michael Scheibe, email to author, July 13, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, February 2011.

pursuit of that end.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the recurring statement “For the sake... ” demonstrates how the Muses seek to serve humanity’s development through the selfless qualities of love, and creativity, and sacrifice.<sup>102</sup>

Every compositional aspect of *The Nine Muses* is affected by the text. The entire structure of the piece is determined by the organization of the poetic stanzas, with melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and textural aspects depicting the character of each Muse.

*The Nine Muses* is set primarily in a syllabic manner. Exceptions occur in the cases of text repetition, melismatic writing, and text displacement, where the composer slightly alters the actual setting of the text. Textual repetition is typically found wherever imitative and/or sequential writing occurs. It is also prevalent in Stanza-Sections II and III (mm. 54–113, 164–185, respectively) and is found on small word groupings such as “Yield we up,” (mm. 240–245) and in the fugal section (mm. 272–283).

Short melismatic figures are also found throughout the piece. These passages occur on the text “O dance” (m. 71), “look” (see Example 34 below), “yield we up” (mm. 249–250 and Example 31 above), and on a few words in the fugal section (mm. 267–294). The least common method of melismatic writing is the displacement of text out of its original order in the poem, occurring on the text “For tragic tales” (mm. 221–226) and “yield we up” (mm. 249–250).

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<sup>101</sup> John Stirling Walker, phone interview with author, February 2011.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

183

S 1

look, \_\_\_

look, \_\_\_

S 2

look, \_\_\_

look, \_\_\_

A 1

look, \_\_\_

look, \_\_\_

A 2

look, \_\_\_

look, \_\_\_

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

*cresc.*

Example 34. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 183–185.

There are also occasions of word painting in the composition. In Stanza-Section Two there is a rising figure on the text “All that lifts” that builds from the bass part up through the sopranos (see Example 35 below).

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are "all that lifts, \_\_\_ that lifts, \_\_\_". The Soprano and Alto parts are marked "unis." above the notes. The Tenor part has a "8" below the first note. The Bass part has a "B" below the first note. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Example 35. David Conte, *The Nine Muses*, mm. 111–113.

Other examples of word painting are found throughout the piece. In m. 150 of stanza-section III, the accompaniment drops out completely on the word “light” while the men sing the root and third of a C major triad, lightening both the texture and complexity of the music. Word painting is also found in mm. 1–4 and mm. 54–57, where the active lines characterize “sing” and “dance,” respectively. His musical setting of “brilliant, shining” (mm. 173–174) creates an atmosphere reflecting the meaning of the text.



## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### SUMMARY

David Conte's *American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses* offer great insight to his compositional technique for chorus with ensemble accompaniment. Analysis of these pieces reveals compositional inclinations with regards to structure, texture (including both vocal and instrumental writing), tonal organization, melody, rhythm, and setting of text.

#### *Structure*

The structure of Conte's compositions is reflective of the poetry to which the music is set. Although melody, harmonic structure, the use of vocal and instrumental forces, dynamics, and other factors may determine the structural music sections, it is the poetic text that is the greatest factor in determining major sections of his music. Thus, as a form of associative music, he shapes sections of his music based on the poetic stanzas he sets, identified in this paper as stanza-sections.

Instrumental interludes are common within the compositions studied, and are used for different purposes. In the two pieces studied, an instrumental interlude can separate one stanza-section from another, serve as a prelude or postlude to the music presented by the singer(s), or function as its own musical entity. Instrumental interludes also provide an opportunity for solos, a change of tonal center, and rhythmic approach (i.e., meter, rhythmic idea).

### *Texture*

Conte uses a variety of compositional elements including homophonic and polyphonic practices in the works studied. He also incorporates a variety of sounds and colors through his scoring of instruments and voices.

Vocal homophony and polyphony are common throughout both *American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses*. In some instances, entire stanza-sections are set in a homophonic manner, and other times he limits the use of homophony to bring about a desired musical effect. Conte also approaches the use of polyphony in multiple ways, including vocal and instrumental counterpoint, imitative/layered entrances (and motivic ideas within the melodic line), fugato, countermelody, and canon. The contrast between his homophonic and polyphonic writing is used to portray certain ideas in the music or from the text.

Conte uses multiple voice combinations in these compositions. Besides common four-part SATB writing, he also groups two or three voice parts at a time to accomplish various colors and textures. The voicing is also subject to eight-part *divisi*, double choir format, or set in unison. He also accommodates solo

writing in his choirs, as a featured solo, in duets, and in concerto with the main vocal ensemble.

The use of instrumental writing varies throughout the works studied. At times the accompaniment is in the background, producing sustained tones for harmonic support, and at other times serving a lively and active melodic role in the foreground. The instruments present melodic material (primary melodic ideas, countermelodies, obbligato lines, etc.), double voices, and offer rhythmic interest.

Conte has an affinity for piano four-hands and percussion ensembles, being inspired by tradition and accessibility.<sup>103</sup> This type of ensemble provides multiple choices for color and can be used as a substitute orchestra. The piano part is the foundation of the accompaniment ensemble, often employed in independent, colorful, and sometimes virtuosic piano ways. The primo and secundo piano parts can vary greatly in their respective roles, one doubling or replacing other instruments and voices, while the other engaging in an independent part, or waiting in tacit. Conte uses a variety of percussion in his ensembles—both pitched and non-pitched instruments—to provide melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic qualities to the music.

The various combination of voices and instruments as discussed offers Conte a wide range of sounds, colors, tones and dynamics in expressing his music. His combining of forces highlights climactic moments, while the reduction of forces brings focus to certain texts, vocal lines and chords. The adding and

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<sup>103</sup> David Conte, interview by author, San Francisco, CA, June 2010.

reducing of forces is also employed in the concluding measures of Conte's pieces. Some compositions seem to fade away by the reduction of either vocal or instrumental forces (*The Nine Muses*, *Veni Creator*), and others seemingly exclaim their conclusion in *tutti* (*i thank You God*).

### *Tonal Organization*

Conte's compositions are harmonically complex and are often challenging to analyze, yet are always grounded in tonality. Tonal centers in his music can be rapidly changing, or firmly grounded for extended periods of time. Tonal centers are often connected through third relationships and by the use of mixture and secondary mixture, by shifting to the parallel minor or major, or by changing to enharmonic equivalent keys/modes.

Conte also centers a portion of music on a given tone and then moves freely between modes and scales based on that tone (e.g., D major, E Dorian, E octatonic, etc.). Tonal centers are chosen for a specific purpose—to create a mood, or evoke a certain feeling in a given section. The use of pedal points and other sustained tones are key factors in determining the tonal center.

Conte also uses an array of harmonic techniques in his compositions. Some twentieth century techniques used include pantriadicism, modal and chromatic inflections, pandiatonicism, polychords, quartal harmony and extended chords.

### *Melody*

The melodic writing in the works studied varies greatly from composition to composition, and is most often designed to reflect the ideas of the text.

Therefore his melodies are as varied as the texts he uses, incorporating rising, falling, level, and wave-form shapes, commonly creating asymmetrical melodic phrase lengths to express his musical thoughts. The treatment of melodic material (sequence, inversion, retrograde, etc.) occurs within the harmonic framework of the piece, and is not always deliberate.<sup>104</sup>

### *Rhythm*

The rhythms in David Conte's works have been described as exciting, interesting and energetic.<sup>105</sup> In *American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses* he achieves rhythmic interest through a number of devices, including shifts in meter. Some compositions are imbued with mixed meter, while others employ the technique sparingly, but it is common in each composition of this study. Mixed meter is used to accommodate word/syllabic stress in the text, and to signal an upcoming musical event (e.g., cadence, new stanza-section, etc.).

Various vocal and instrumental lines are often set rhythmically independent from one another, either for interest or as part of another technique (e.g., pandiatonicism), yet as a general rule, the rhythmic drive is provided by the accompaniment. Commonly used rhythmic devices include syncopation, hemiola and ostinato (which also provide harmonic stability).

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<sup>104</sup> David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Artemus Conran, "A Study of David Conte's Secular SATB Choral Works with Non-Orchestral Score Complement" (DMA dissertation, University of Arizona, 2003), 177-183.

### *Setting of Text*

Many musical considerations in *American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses* were determined by the text. In order to effectively portray words, phrases and ideas from the text, Conte incorporates various types of melodic lines, meter, rhythm, and accompanimental and vocal textures.

His choice of texts usually employs first person plural settings (or texts which are altered to become that way). The text is predominantly set in a syllabic manner with very little text repetition or melismatic writing.

### CONCLUSIONS

David Conte is a composer who employs twentieth century techniques into his traditionally rooted compositions. The works in this study employ traditional methods of tonality, with structures that are inspired by the original texts. His music is often reflective of and/or motivated by other compositions in one form or another. Although based in tradition and inspired by others, *American Triptych* and *The Nine Muses* are fresh and original, with a sound and a style all his own. Conte's extensive studies and disciplined compositional practices have capacitated a prolific output in his career. Regarding the mechanics of creating music, the composer states:

All of this is done intuitively... which I consider a gift from God; I don't know how else to say it. I train myself to know music as deeply as possible, but in the moment of composing it's like taking a dictation, and the dictation comes from heaven as far as I can figure out. By training yourself in a certain way, you become receptive to the spiritual impulse that is behind of all art—you receive help from

the spiritual world in what you're doing. That's the power of music—that's why music is powerful.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>David Conte, phone interview with author, January 2011.

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## PREFACE TO APPENDIX MATERIALS

The following interviews have been edited to provide clarity and flow for the reader. Segments containing inaccurate information or conversation not pertinent to the study have been omitted. Where clarification was needed, brackets have been placed around the inserted word(s). Brackets also provide insight to events not transcribed in the interview (e.g., listening to examples, playing chords on the piano). Many times during the conversations, sentences were paused and/or restarted, and sentences were left unfinished. In these cases the author has provided edits for the clarity of the reader, yet preserve intact what actually transpired during the interview, often manifested by the use of ellipsis. Places where the words on the recording could not be discerned have been labeled “[unintelligible].”

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, JUNE 29, 2010

### The Nine Muses

Marlen Dee Wilkins: I want to start with *The Nine Muses*.

David Conte: *The Nine Muses*, as a text is really very interesting, more than any other text. I don't know if [your church] has a consciousness in their theology about the reign of the archangels, but we are in the age of Michael now.

Like the article said, I thought about writing something about war, and then John [Stirling Walker] was the one who said to me "You have this opportunity to [unintelligible]."

I went to every [ACDA] national convention between 1987 and 2007 when that piece was performed. I'm actually giving an interest session in 2011 on musicianship. I just found out they accepted my [proposal], which I'm very excited about, because that's another strong interest of mine, is the teaching of musicianship like ear training. I've studied solfège and studied and taught a lot and I have a lot of thoughts about it, and how that connects to singing as well, and composing.

But John then suggested, "Why don't you write something about the art of music," so he wrote *The Nine Muses*, and that's what I ended up doing instead.

It's a piece that, to my disappointment, I would say it's not a piece that's caught on.

Now, it's a fifteen minute piece, for piano four-hands and two percussionists, but it's not hugely expensive to do. I think it's difficult in some ways, interpretively, and it requires a good choir vocally. In terms of the musicianship challenges, it's not nearly as hard as [unintelligible].

MDW: I believe the piece is listed on the website as a chamber orchestra piece. Is that what you qualify as a chamber orchestra?

DC: Now I might say chamber ensemble... I will tell you this. It is a piece that I want to write for orchestra. When I was writing it I was thinking in terms of the orchestra, but I would wait probably for someone to commission that. So it's a piece I envision as being for orchestra eventually, but this piano four-hands and percussion is something I have done about half a dozen times. It's a great kind of small ensemble that you can get a lot of color, out of percussion, of course.

All of these pieces (*Elegy for Matthew*, *Eos*, *The Nine Muses*, *American Triptych*, *September Sun*) are what I call more "extended works." Because what so much of what choral composers do is anthem-like; so it's not like a *Requiem* or a choral symphony, *Eos* is more. It's about 35 minutes. I don't know if there's any reason we would want to look at that piece, frankly. Given how my consciousness has evolved, I don't know if I would have set that text today, but at the time I did.

MDW: Once again, I'm not really familiar with that piece.

[Listening to *The Nine Muses*]

MDW: So what's got to be cool is to have Jo-Michael Scheibe doing your music, or any good choir.

DC: It's a privilege. It's really powerful. You hope you are giving people things that are nourishing, that are elevating them, having contact with the notes that I have chosen to go with the words, that they're actually experiencing some kind of elevation. That's my goal and my role.

MDW: Now, was that recording a fairly accurate representation?

DC: Except for that one *rallentando* that he just kept forgetting to do (m. 37), I think it's very good. They're an excellent choir, and that choir had about 65. I've heard it done with a smaller choir and it's OK. I think it really would be best done with a big choir of 100. I'd like to hear it done with, I don't know how big Ron's (Staheli) choir is, but I knew how many I had.

Gene Brooks, who extended this commission to me, said "You can have whoever you want of who's been selected to perform at the national convention." And so he gave me the list, and Mike was the person I knew the best. Charles Bruffy really wanted to do it, but his group is too small.

So I think you're going to want to talk about works that are extended, with orchestra, or with instruments. I think you're probably going to want to say something about the form. The form of this piece is structured – well I believe it is in the program notes.

Going back to *Les Noces* of Stravinsky, there's a certain tradition that got started with piano and percussion way back in 1917 with *Les Noces*, and then a piece like *Carmina Burana* (now these are secular pieces) as well as the Bartók sonata for two pianos and percussion (that's a very famous piece by Bartók). So there's a kind of composer, like me, who's inspired by tradition. I often think of this combination. It can be a kind of substitute for a larger orchestra; groups can perform it that don't have access to an orchestra.

We're talking about *The Muses*. Those are a sort of sense of the virtual, there's a sense of the ancient in a way, the ceremonial. [In] the timpani, we [attain] a type of solemnity with use of the timpani, the use of the pitched percussion family, the xylophone, marimba and glock. There's a whole range there of hardness and softness and brightness. The vibes are used in the section about astronomy and astrology, and the glock in [unintelligible], the marimba is used in sacred poetry, the xylophone is used in humor and the dance, because it's brighter and more brittle.

So there's a whole range of... it's like they say, we only see that there's snow, but an Eskimo will see 15 different kinds of snow. If you are really listening sensitively, even within the percussion family, there's this range of color and gradation, and that's what I'm trying to play with. Now, my own philosophy is that percussion is effective in inverse ratio to its use, it wears out. It's very easy to over-write for percussion – it can end up sounding too jangly. It stops giving information, but I tried to use it judiciously and for exactly what I needed.

The fugue – it’s definitely a kind of homage of another work that’s very famous. Did you notice the timpani was hitting every quarter? The Brahms’ *Requiem* has that. It was absolutely conscious – I did that on purpose.

Like so many composers interested in counterpoint, and in particular fugue, this has one, *September Sun* has a fugue “Just as God’s love shone on good and bad alike, you shine O Sun, you shine.” It’s the last line of the first part of the poem.

MDW: So John set “We sing the Muses” as just an introduction to what follows?

DC: Yeah. We sing the Muses. And here’s the thing about John’s poetry (and you will appreciate this), is that he’s trying to bring a certain older sensibility, even sometimes you can even say a nineteenth century sensibility – where some of his constructions also evoke Shakespeare, the King James Bible. You know, it’s a kind of older way of... in the modern world people are more and more materialistic, and less and less aware of spiritual things, and the language reflects that. So John is totally committed to keeping that impulse at a time when people were more conscious and people took for granted things that are now.

For example, [on the text] “We sing the muses,” instead of “We sing *of* the muses,” or “We sing *to* the muses,” it’s a more of an ancient construct. And everything is “For the sake of.” “For the sake of all that sings bring we mighty glorious things, things of marvel, things of splendor, things no mortal finds an end for.” I used to have it memorized... I always memorize whatever text I set.



So then there's dance – “For the sake of all that dances.” And John and I, we sat down when we were in Kansas, and he went through and he said “You've got to picture the trees, the dancing of all of nature, you know, of God's creation, of weather.” “For the sake of all that dances, will we gracious motion, glances fervent, hearts on fire, all that lifts the body higher.”

MDW: So both of you view dance as very, very broad in this case?

DC: Yes, but we're also talking, of course, of physical, with the physical dimension of our bodies, which is real, of course.

MDW: “All that lifts the body higher” – that's like you said the trees, and everything?

DC: Yes, everything. When you look at a grapefruit seed (this is what scientists can't measure) – what is in that seed that's going to create the tree? We can't measure that scientifically. But that's God, it's life, it's life force. He's thinking in those terms.

And then History – “For the sake of all that marches.” That's almost cliché that history marches. “Onward, through the arches of historical conditions, make we light of prohibitions.” That's a kind of subtle thought. It's certainly not saying. There's a difference between liberty and license Boulanger used to say, so just because you have license to do something doesn't mean that you actually have true liberty. Young people, particularly, want to have freedom, but true freedom is really something else. It's not just the right to do whatever you want whenever you feel like it. So the “make we light of prohibitions,” the things in culture that

inhibit a person from realizing their full potential. You could even look at that as all of the things in human history that have helped people down in various ways.

Astronomy – now this is where the archangel Michael comes in – it’s in reference to him. “For the sake of heavenly cycles, planets coursing under Michael’s brilliant shining solar power, say we look, it is the hour.”

MDW: Where is that? That’s in quotes... is that in the Bible?

DC: No, I don’t mean it’s a direct quote to anything in the Bible, per se, but it’s summoning up now the personage of the archangel Michael. We’re in the Michaelic age. Again, I don’t know if in your tradition there is this consciousness that there are certain ages of the reign of [angels]. Well, I’m not as versed in it as John is.

Rudolph Steiner, a very profound spiritual scientist wrote for the Michaelic age that we must eradicate from the soul all fear and terror of what comes towards Man, out of the future. We must acquire serenity in all feelings and sensations about the future. We must look forward with absolute equanimity to everything that may come. And we must think only that whatever comes is given to us by a world-directive full of wisdom. It is part of what we must learn in this age, namely, to live out of pure trust, without any security in existence - trust in the ever - present help of the spiritual world. Truly, nothing else will do if our courage is not to fail us. And let us seek the awakening from within ourselves, every morning and every evening [continues, but unintelligible].

So in my notes I said the declaration that “It is the hour,” that’s in the muse about Astronomy and Astrology – that’s when the women do their climax – “It is the hour,” and the triangle has that roll. It is the hour for humanity to receive the blessing, it is the hour for humanity to receive the blessings that have been earned through its collective suffering (you could say it’s about the second coming of Christ), and the admonition that only the “daring passion” of the courageous will suffice to vanquish the remaining opposition to these blessings. It’s not meant to sound like some sugar-coated new-age bromide that everything is just fine. If we really have this consciousness that we are redeemed, we are forgiven, all of those things – the promise, Christ’s promise, that that’s a reality if we can live into that. It’s a way of saying that. But later, [comes] the idea of the courageous (it’s in the very last Muse).

“Tragedy – for the sake of tragic tales, that deepen, feelingly travails stronghold on human minds, write we forthwith much that binds.”

MDW: The poetry has so much depth... I’m reading it and thinking “I need to think through this more.”

DC: It’s oblique in the sense that (I hope not in the terms that it’s confusing), but that it needs to be penetrated. Also, it’s not talking about concrete things in the way that we are used to.

MDW: It’s thought-provoking.

DC: “Bound to virtue, bound to truth, bound to beauty, yea, forsooth” (forsooth is, you know, an old construction), “for the sake of all that honors, yield

we up the Sacred.” I remember John telling me when he heard the music there – the smoke, the feeling of this rising line has to be not only like the incense of, not necessarily a church service, but like the smoke from the ruins in Vietnam. It’s like we have to take in all of that. Whatever I had written was not for his (and this often happens), I placed it in front of him and he says “you haven’t quite got what I was going for.” Like it’s not enough, it doesn’t accomplish the musical ideas you are having are somehow not... it hasn’t captured exactly. And he has enough knowledge of music to talk to me in a way that he’s been able to pull... This is the great privilege of working with words, is that you are required to penetrate the meaning of words to speak (and I always ask myself, who is speaking unto whom?). So if I a psalm, it’s the people speaking to God [I must be] aware of who is speaking unto whom, and keeping that as a vivid picture. Then you have to enter into the spirit of that, and sometimes we’re not necessarily there in terms of [unintelligible].

And I think writers throughout the ages have often said “I had to do this, and I wasn’t really ready to do it, but I rose to the occasion,” or “I realized I really wanted to set this, and I wasn’t ready, so I waited until I was ready.” I don’t know if many people really have that kind of reverence for the word now. I think there’s a lot of casual – our whole culture has a certain casualness. I think even a lot of settings of Latin that people are doing now – that when I hear it, they don’t sound... they’re kind of doing it because it’s Latin, and it’s a dead language, and it

sounds good vowels, but is there a true devotional feeling to the music? I think not always. I try myself to have that feeling when I'm doing those texts.

MDW: The blind guy that I was helping off the train – he's a composer. Someone helped him on the BART, and they said "He needs to get off at Civic Center," so I just went over and sat down by him and we got to talking and he asked why I was here. He said "I'm a composer, and starting to get a lot of stuff published." I believe his name was John Garnett, or something like that. So I said, do you do commissions, and he said something about the American Composer's Forum. He was blind, he lives in Palm Springs.

DC: That's kind of amazing, that you just happened to help a blind man – we should think about that for a minute. So you meet a blind composer, and you aid him on your way to work with another composer. So you're charged with the responsibility of being, through your work, (you can look at it this way), for being the eyes through which other people can see.

MDW: I remember this now, he discussed the popular Christian music era, and that it's (and I'm using my own words now) shallow. The connection to the words which you are talking about – there's a lot in John's poetry here that I'm going to need to sit down and be in touch with what the poetry is really saying – and you're just not going to get it on your first go.

DC: Of course, some poetry, the lyrics are somewhat straightforward and clear. I think *September Sun*, for example is a much easier poem to understand, and that's the same writer, you know. "Grace, ceaseless and abounding

overwhelms us, descends by way of death, sweet, tragic death, waited upon the rising sun that enveloped, in its warmth, with its rays, lives, that morning.” So this isn’t death as a punishment. In fact, he said, you’re making death sound punitive of the music I was writing. “Lives that morning lived in expectation – sweet, tragic life. Innocent lives, it took, not so blessed, too, perhaps (we know that not everyone who was in the towers was [innocent]). Yet, just as God’s love shone on good and bad alike (that’s a scriptural reference). Just as God’s love shone on good and bad alike you shine, O Sun, you shine.”

Then the second part is *In New York*. “Tens of thousands of hundreds hurry, to embark upon the market’s seas, and the intrigues of their fury.” It’s a picture of that morning. It’s also making a certain... well, what were all of those people hurrying to do? What were the trade towers? “To embark upon the market’s seas, and the intrigues.” I don’t think anyone who is really honest can say that the way our financial system is structured, with interest and everything, there’s this kind of gain. “And the intrigues of their fury.” “In New York, dynamism moves and shakes them. Tell me then, O, glorious Sun, how it felt to witness your dynamic sons and daughters offering their innocence on the altar of old reparations.” That’s a reference to the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac. “Did you repair to that island” (meaning like, retreat). “Did you repair to that island of yours, O Sun, that island where your grief becomes our grace” (which is a Christ reference)?

The poem is really, it is a memorial poem for those who perished, but it's talking about something larger, too. The *Elegy for Matthew* is also an acrostic.

It's true that my collaborations with him (John), you may start to see a pattern – they are often about specific events or people. We did a piece about Martin Luther King, for Chanticleer, called *Homecoming*, which is an amazing poem, and it's inspired by [one of] King's letters although it's not in the poem – a six minute a cappella work. But that was also connected to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King's death, which was 2008.

MDW: Let's look at another one of these pieces. Why don't we pull out *September Sun* and *Elegy for Matthew*.

### September Sun

DC: You know what occurs to me, Dee? You should talk to John. He would be delighted to talk to you. He's in Denver, you might be able to see him face to face, but you can also talk to him on the phone. So here's his poem, here's [the acrostic] you see? "God dwells in joy in the midst of sorrow."

[Listen to *September Sun*]

[Pause listening to "*In New York*"]

MDW: So really, that's just a pedal...

DC: Yes, and the orchestral introduction and this are the exact same music from D to B.

I don't know if you know what the octatonic scale is? It's based on... it's a very important scale in the twentieth century [plays scale]. It alternates half-

whole-half-whole, so you get [plays chords] those kinds of key areas, related by minor thirds, D major, F major, Ab major, B major. They're all what we would say in theory 'not closely related keys,' they're distantly related, and all the tonalities are all controlled by that scale in this movement.

MDW: Tell me, what else should we know about the interludes, or...

DC: I'll tell you (I've never told anyone this), that one of the inspirations for this movement is *Der Erlkönig*, Schubert.

[Referring to the introduction of *In New York*] it's the urgency of it, and the drama of it. Here it is in the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, if you've ever been to New York, and you take the subway when everyone is going to work, it's absolute pandemonium. Certainly tens of thousands of people hurrying to go to work. You know, the thing people forget about that morning is it was Election Day, and that's why only three thousand people got hurt. I don't know how thousands of people weren't there yet, because the planes hit before nine in the morning. I think the first one hit at 8:40, and the second at 9:30, and I had friends actually from Cornell who worked in the trade towers who weren't at work because they had gone to vote – they just weren't there that day, or yet. Many more people would have been killed if it hadn't been Election Day. That's a strange twist of fate.

[Discussion and resume listening]

MDW: Define dynamism for the country boy.

DC: Dynamic, if something's really dynamic. Vitality or energy.

Dynamism moves and shakes them. These are all the people moving to the



market. Dynamism moves and shakes them. And I think “moves and shakes” might be something of a reference. “And I will shake,” you know, in the *Messiah*. I think John may not even, no he probably is fully conscious of it, someone who knows as well as he does, the Bible, the King James Bible, especially – it’s going to come out in the language in phrases here and there. “Moves and shakes them,” and I tried to depict that in the melismatic writing of this passage, as it moves in imitative pairs of voices.

[Resume listening]

[While listening to mm. 275-286]

DC: This is the buildings falling down (to me).

MDW: [While listening to mm. 305-306] Something’s rising...

DC: The text changes there. “Tell me, then.” The speaker before is like a narrator, now the speaker is saying “Tell me then, O Sun,” and is using the pronoun ‘You.’ “Did you retreat to that island of yours, O Sun, that island where your grief becomes our grace,” which is how the poem [begins]; “grace, ceaseless and abounding, overwhelms us, descends by way of death. Sweet, tragic death.”

MDW: So back to this rising figure.

DC: We’re talking to the sun now, but it’s so solemn, it’s in E major, but it’s mixed. I can speak in great detail. You probably don’t have time to go into much detail, but to have something to refer to the choice of harmonies and key areas and inflections and chromatics that are signified.

So we're in E major, but it's not just a completely simply uncomplicated E major because the harmony is borrowed from the minor. So you have this chord that goes [plays chords found in mm. 308-309]. So, E major, F# minor (which is ii), G major (which is III, borrowed from the minor), ending on IV, and IV-I, of course, is plagal, which to me always has reference to reverent, kind of solemn, religious feeling about it.

And the open [interval of a tenth], you know, when I say you have E to G# the parallel tenths, there's a sort of openness in the interval that speaks.

When I compose, I don't think intellectually of these things, I just... hear it. Composing is like taking dictation. It's like I listen to what should come next and I write it down. I'm not saying that it doesn't proceed without revision, or false starts and trying something else, but essentially it's dictation – it's hearing what should come next. I think that's all composing is, in a simple way what comes next. Just like when you're talking, what is the next word for your thought? In a great poem, what is the order of the words?

[Discussion and resume listening]

[Return to talk of progression found in mm. 308-309]

It's really a simple progression. It's actually a similar progression in *The Nine Muses*, in the Humor passage. You see, composers do this; they borrow from each other, in terms of the music [plays piano]. It sounds different because the harmonies are slightly different, but it is borrowing F major, Ab, F major, Ab. But then it brightens when "God pours out his holy light upon mankind in its

plight,” and then “to lighten mankind’s load,” that’s where the music gets lighter. Something about “humor bold”, and then the bold is “yum ta da dum,” the bold figures come in, and the xylophone comes in and it’s almost like chuckling and laughing. So this whole passage is in unison.

[Resume listening]

It’s completely [pauses] something guiding me. The fact that I was able – I needed to get to the very opening [of the piece] on the word “Grace” – and I didn’t plan it consciously. I was shown the way through my ear how it – the way it goes through all of those keys, and then we end in E major, which is the dominant of A. But I didn’t consciously plan it out, but I consider it a gift that I was able to do that because that’s the truth of the emotion of the piece. So then we end up where we started on the word “grace.”

What’s so interesting is that the opening sounds completely different now that we’ve heard everything in-between, even though it’s exactly the same music. To me it always does – if you listen to the piece from beginning to end.

[Resume listening]

I try to teach my students to work fast, which doesn’t mean casual or hurried. It just means to write with confidence, and that’s about technique.

That piece is more straightforward in terms of the orchestration and the text, to some extent, and it’s for string orchestra.

MDW: What orchestration decisions did you have to make on this piece?

DC: Well, the strings are the most expressive of any choir, I think, without question. I mean, the winds also express something memorable, but it's really hard to hear a whole concert of a wind quintet, or even like a solo oboe and a regular piano for an hour and a half. You can hear violin and piano. It's like the range of what they have to say is smaller. It's more, perhaps, distinctive in a certain sense. And that's what's great about the orchestra, is that all of the instruments have their character in all of these various combinations.

With strings, there's something, again, more monumental about them. They're the oldest instruments, they've changed the least, in terms of how violins were made in the 1700's is really not that different from now. Whereas, the modern flute, or trumpet or French horn are almost unrecognizable from what they were.

I have to say, also that the Barber *Adagio for Strings*, which you know, was a piece that was played at President Roosevelt's funeral in 1945 and the whole nation heard it on the radio. It's probably one of the most famous pieces in American music. There's a certain mood of national mourning and I wanted to invoke that in my music because it was for the anniversary. It was one of the most important events in the twentieth century in this country. It's one of the only times we were attacked on our own soil. And I wanted to address that relationship of mourning, as it were.

There are some extensive program notes on this that I can send you that John wrote about [it]. He was in New York on September 10<sup>th</sup> with a professor of

philosophy from Denmark who was a prominent [teacher] at a school founded by Rudolph Steiner. They drove around the twin towers, and were talking about America's future and its role in the world, and he flew out that night. It was a stroke of fate.

So the ten-year anniversary is coming up in 2011, which is next year. So this piece, I'm hoping will keep moving out in the world. You know, as a composer, you write these pieces and you hope people will perform them.

[Lunch break]

### American Triptych

DC: I think this is the hardest choral piece I've written; rhythmically it's just so tricky.

So the original, which has all the saxophones and everything, the original performance was so bad because it was too hard for everybody. I can hardly bear to listen to it. It's was what I call "shambles." So I don't know if I'm ever going to publish that version. I'd like to do a version for orchestra perhaps, but this reduced version has a lot of color in it.

[Listening to *i thank You God*]

MDW: I found that part effective, with the building sequence. [*i thank You God* mm. 25-32]

DC: It's really a great text. Well, once again, the structure of the language gives the music. I always hear this piece very fast. I don't understand how it can be set slow, myself, because when you read the text it has all these images of

movement; leaping, trees are leaping. I don't understand a slow setting of it – that's just my take on it. I hear it fast myself, I should say.

[Resume listening to *i thank You God*]

MDW: How did the 7/8 meter (mm. 79-139) help you accomplish your ideas for this section?

DC: I just heard the piece as a groove. “How should tasting, touching, hearing, seeing breathing any – lifted from the no of all nothing – human merely being doubt unimaginable you?” How could anyone doubt the existence of God is what I think he's saying, in every aspect that we might experience, all the senses. I repeated “how should” on purpose because, because I felt like it was a hard poem, and music makes it harder to understand sometimes. I just repeated the “how should” each time because each statement is spread out. So this whole movement is in 7/8 and is meant to be exuberant.

MDW: I think the 7/8 kind of propels it forward.

DC: Yeah, I think so too.

[Resume and end listening to *i thank You God*]

DC: So I have a dear friend who lives in Sweden, he's, I think, one of the best soprano sax players in the world, and I wrote this with him in mind. I've written other pieces for him. So now, for the next two movements the soprano sax comes in and plays throughout.

MDW: So you have to have a sax player with chops then?

DC: Well, just a beautiful sound. That's the hardest thing about the soprano sax, is it can sound kind of "honky."

[Begin listening to *Veni Creator*]

MDW: So it's *American Triptych*, even though it's a sacred Latin text... Is this just a paraphrase?

DC: It's this poet's paraphrase of the *Veni Creator*. It's definitely a paraphrase of, you might say it's inspired by the original, but it's not a direct, absolute paraphrase. That's the name of the poem, *Veni Creator*.

MDW: So because it's a paraphrase, because this [poet] was American, is why it was included in the triptych?

DC: Well, I wanted to find three poems. I didn't want to use text from scripture I wanted to use modern, twentieth century poets, and it's hard to find good religious poetry, and I thought this one... The Cummings is very famous, and the *Mariner's Carol* is quite an amazing poem.

[Conte reads lines from *Veni Creator*]

I don't really know anything about him [Bliss Carman]. I found the poem in an anthology of twentieth century sacred poetry. I do remember learning about him at the time.

[Continue listening to *Veni Creator*]

DC: [While listening] I feel like I need to hear it live again.

[End listening to *Veni Creator*]

[Begin listening to *Mariner's Carol*]

DC: [While listening to mm. 103-113] It's such a beautiful texture.

[Pause listening to *Mariner's Carol*]

MDW: So in the foreground is choir and saxophone, yes?

DC: Saxophone is more of a middle-ground, often commenting, or coming in with a long note.

[Discussion of mm. 147-158]

DC - This is all kind of a minimalist motor. Lots of different rhythm shapes, it's just kind of a web. There is no doubling of vocal parts, they are singing like their own melody

[Continue and end listening to *Veni Creator*]

DC: You see how dependent a composer is on other people, unless you just write for yourself. But if you write for other people you are completely at the mercy of everybody else – you have to earn their good will.



APPENDIX B  
PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE  
OCTOBER 30, 2010

i thank You God

David Conte: Yeah, so how I can maybe help you, as I helped Michael Conran, is by being clear about what the key areas are, because the form of the piece is built around the tonal plan. The modulations are connected to text and to the structure of the text and the feeling that's in the words. The piece is in C, obviously, it begins and ends there.

I'm just going to talk freely and then stop me if you have any questions. So the opening is in C with these inflections to C minor, the Bb's and the Eb's. Then at Letter A, on the entrance, we enter on a kind of IV chord. The bass is on F and then the chorus comes in with their motive, which is these leaping fifths, which to me the interval of the fifth has this kind of prehensile strength and it suggests a kind of optimism and confidence, and the kind of extraverted feeling of this text.

Marlen Dee Wilkins: What's that first word you said?

DC: Oh, prehensile. Let me see if I can give you a synonym for that. P-R-E-H-E-N-S-I-L-E. It says, 'capable of grasping.' It says, 'an attribute, chiefly of an animal's limb or tail capable of grasping.' So it's like how monkeys can hold on to tree trunks with their tails, or elephants with their trunks. You know,

whatever they can do. It's a way of describing a kind of grounding and strength. I actually didn't realize it had that connection to the animal kingdom. You know we're not in the animal kingdom here, we're in the kingdom of God.

So again, the chorus opens with this unison statement of the melody. The piece is based very much on this motif of the leaping fifth. [plays fifths on piano] The whole melody is almost nothing but a series of fifths, C-G, D-A, E-B, F-C, and then we end on "day." We end on a dominant. The way my music works is it's completely tonal but the harmony is a rich kind of extended harmony with added notes and sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth. But we moved essentially from C to G. Not in terms of key area, but in terms of harmony. So we're I to V on "day."

"For the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a true blue dream of sky," so we enter into more of a dream image and there's a softer quality to the word there, because, "leaping" has motion and action and again is more extraverted and then how I understand it - all this... I don't do this consciously I just kind of reach for the sounds that I think express the character of the words. And then, if I look at it, I can say intellectually, 'Yeah, well, this is why,' because that's just part of my technique as a composer when I work with words. It's just something that I do. I've trained myself to do it and I've done it hundreds of times, thousands of times. So, "and the blue true dream of sky," we move into Eb.

Now, Eb has been set up from the first page, you see? Because, you know, the Eb's and the Bb's that are in the very first page, [are still] within the context of C.

So this is again in composing, in my own understanding and belief, is that every note grows out of every other note and every note is accountable to every other note. It's a question of order. Just like there's an order in the Universe, and things happen in a certain order. In composition, the order of the notes, one following another, is what the argument of the piece, and when I say argument, I mean that in the kind of Platonic, or Socratic or Aristotelian concept. You know, in his poetics, where he talks about the nature of art. In that sense, the argument [refers to] these ideas that are being stated and how it turns out.

Sonata form is an argument, you could say, not in the sense of people disagreeing, but in the sense of ideas being stated and them being in contrast to each other, and sometimes conflicting and resolving. That's the drama of music.

So, in "blue true dream of sky" we go into Eb and it softens. The dynamic comes down to mezzo-forte. "Blue, true, dream of sky," and we end on V there, again on "sky." You look at that chord and you see all the notes in it. Well, it's definitely a V chord, although there's no third, because it's actually a V9.

And there's the motive again. [plays on piano] But, you know, somewhat altered. But there's some rhythm exchange and the same pitch shape, even though they now have a fifth instead of a sixth.

“And for everything.” So now this next line is the transition into the word "Yes," which is a big arrival right at the end of the stanza. The problem is organizing stanzas. He organizes it where he divides - he puts space between certain thoughts, right?

MDW: Right.

DC: So then “For everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes," it's still the same shape... [plays on piano]... of rising fifths. Sometimes they're fourths until we get to A. We're going to A major. So how do we move from Eb to A, which is really very, you know - if you think about your knowledge of keys and their relationship – they're very far apart. They're far distant here. They're a tritone apart. This is maybe what the conversation to have. You'd like to have it now, but it would really help you to understand the idea of mixture. Do you know what that is in theory?

MDW: I'm not familiar with that term...

DC: OK. Mixture, where we borrow from keys that are... you have modulations to closely related keys, OK? Those are all keys that are related. Their key signatures differ by only one accidental. So in C major, the key of any minor is closely related. And the key of G major and E minor and F major and D minor, those are closely related keys. We have keys related to what we call mixture, keys related to the parallel minors. So that would mean the keys in C minor.

So that's Eb and F minor and G minor and Ab major. So there are three kinds of mixture. That's called simple mixture. Then there's secondary mixture and double mixture. And so there's a way of understanding. You know what would be helpful for you to do if you have time is - do you have the Aldwell and Schachter book, *Harmony and Voice Leading*? It's the harmony book that's most widely used right now, probably.

MDW: No, I don't have that one.

DC: If you have access to it, there's a chapter on mixture, and it explains this thing I'm saying, that there's a way of relating - if you put C in the center of this piece, it's organized around the key of C and it goes to all these different keys, which are related to each other with varying degrees of closeness or farness. So, by the time we've moved from C major through Eb to A major, A major is again related through secondary mixture. That's when you change the third of a chord that's in the key itself. So A minor is closely related, right? If we change that to an A major, we call that secondary mixture.

And those chords function in secondary dominants often - that would be V/ii. That's not how it works here, but that's where the term secondary comes from.

It is the most comprehensive harmony book published in English, to my knowledge. And it's in use since... I used it at Cornell in the late '70s. It's gone through several editions and it is still the book that is the most widely used. It's not the only book that's used, but it is the book that I think is the most thorough

and the best book of all of them that are out there, including Piston and everybody else. And it has a Schenkerian point of view - everything in the book is laid out in Schenkerian terms.

So the phrase “everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes” - is a transitional modulatory phrase. It’s moving through, it’s not settling in any one key and it has all the triads that are related by thirds, down by thirds. Ab to F to Db to Bb, to G to E, which is the dominant of A. And then at Letter D, we arrive at A major. This is very affirming to narrow the analysis - this is also the highest - this is the key no one sings higher. Sopranos sing their high A, they have, you know, other high notes in the piece, but this is a kind of first climax, at the end of the first stanza, “which is yes”. And you notice the chord has no third in it in the chorus in order that the harmonies under it can move and not conflict.

So when you actually have this open fifth with no third, so - you can see the measure numbers, like m. 32, you have a IV chord in the left hand, now there’s a D chord. It’s a IV9. We move from I to IV. The progression to IV, the plagal progression, has a reverent feeling, which is in keeping with this text, of course. And so all this – we’re still in A major, and when the basses re-enter and the tenors “I who have died.”

MDW: We’re still in A major?

DC: The thing is that in this style of writing harmonically, I’m going back and forth between major and parallel minor. Just as I do in the first page: C major,

C minor. You can see if you look at the two measures before Letter E, there are C naturals, and G naturals and F naturals.

“I who have died am alive again today, and this is the Sun's birthday,” we modulate back to C.

MDW: We modulate back to C. I say we're at C at mm. 47, but that's actually the dominant.

DC: You're right. Well, no there's a tonic, let's see [mm.] 44, 45, 46, 47 "this is." It's really a tonic 6/4 chord. Because the right hand of Piano 2, is C major triad. So we are in C major already and, “this is the birthday,” we've not modulated although we borrow again, you see Eb chords and Ab's, those are all from C minor; borrowing. But when we arrive at Letter F on “life,” we're in another I chord on “birthday,” although the fifth is in the bass. But, if you look at that chord on “birthday,” it's a I9 in first inversion. C E G chord with a D, but E is in the bass of the chorus. [And on the word] “Birthday,” we [begin to] go through a circle of fifths. So we have “birthday” C “of life” F and then down a third to D “birthday of love.” So C - F - D - G. These are the roots of the chords, but the bass is frequently on the fifth. So this whole passage is a circle of fifths progression where we go, “birthday of life, and birthday of love,” C to G, “and of wings.” There's another modulation, we go to B major. So C to F is I-IV and then D to G is I-IV in the key of D, we're going up by step. Does that make sense?

MDW: What measure are you looking at?



DC: OK. So we're going back to "this is the birthday," on "birth" C, I to F, (IV). And then repeating again because repeating the words makes sense as you're repeating a chord progression, we're going up a step towards "the birthday of life, and the birthday of love."

MDW: I understand what you're saying. Yes, I'm with you.

DC: Yeah. So then "birthday of love" is another D chord to G, now we're in the key of D briefly, I -IV in the key of D. And then the IV of D right before Letter G. This is how modulations happen. It's a common chord, the IV of D becomes vi of B [plays on piano].

And so now on "wings" we're in the key of B. But again notice that I don't have the root, the tonic, in the bass – it's the fifth. I'm often arriving on the dominant, you know - dominant pedals. You could say that the piece is built on a series of dominant pedals, very often. Sometimes we're on the tonic but often the arrival points are on a dominant. So it's not that we're on the dominant harmony... or it is actually. Wait, let me look. [plays progression on piano] Well, it's more complex than that. But what's important to know, at Letter G we're in the key of B.

MDW: Right.

DC: V-ii, V-ii in the bass. And then we make an enharmonic modulation so that the F# becomes a Gb in m. 66.

And that's because we're moving to Db [laughs], Db major. So, "and of the gay great happening illimitably earth," we are in Db major now, but we are not cadencing on it. It's a kind of ii6/5 [plays on piano].

But we are in Db. And the motive, you know [plays passage on piano] that same theme is yet again. And this whole passage is in Db, "how should tasting, touching," and you know it is something with the text that is - I don't do often, but I actually insert words. Because here's the text, if goes, "how should tasting, touching, feeling, hearing, seeing, being, feeling any." He lists all these senses in a row.

MDW: So you're repeating "how should" to reiterate.

DC: I repeated "how should." It's a liberty I took that I don't take often, but I did it to give the feeling of building to make absolutely clear that each sense is being illuminated.

"How should touching, how should hearing, how should seeing, how should breathing any lifted from the no," and this where we have the next modulation at Letter L. So you see at the arrival at the ends of words, at the ends of phrases, we open up into a new tonality and that's how the piece keeps moving forward. It's like a flower that keeps blooming and opening more and more. And we're really far away from C. But we're going to go back to C.

MDW: Let me reiterate here. On the whole, what I call the third stanza-section, which is, "how should tasting, touching," we're all in Db here still, yes?

DC: All Db. You could say this passage, I would point out... it's really a long time in this key with no chromatics whatsoever. Every note in this passage is only one of the seven notes of the Db major scale. There's no borrowing. There's no chromatic inflection. It's very diatonic here. But now we go, "lifted from the no" - I'm analyzing this along with you because I've never done this. Now what key am I in here? What do you think?

MDW: I have you still in Db for the most part. Now I'm just going to go into one of my big questions. I get some hints from the harp, because the harp part would say that [the key is one thing], and I see no changes in the harp until mm.115, top of pg. 28.

DC: Right. Now here is where it is a little deceiving. When you listen, I think you'll hear this. We still have only these same accidentals, these same seven notes, right, at Db? So if I'm inserting more modulating, what's the first possibility that you would think of?

MDW: The relative minor.

DC: Exactly. So we really go into Bb. Now, here's where you got this thing, it's a mode because we don't have the leading tone so the name of the mode of the natural minor scale is Aeolian. So we move to Db major to Bb Aeolian, which is the same seven notes, but it is the shift of center. And if you listen to it, you'll hear it feels like we've moved [sings] "lifted from the no of all nothing." [sings chord] V-I, you see?

Now, a new accidental is about to come in. “Lifted from the no of all nothing” and that’s the G natural. So it’s just a brief movement [plays passage on piano] to C minor. So that’s a brief reminder of where we started but we’re not going to stay there. We immediately go back...

MDW: I would refer to that as a tonicization.

DC: Well, here’s my rule about tonicizations: first of all, it’s a cadence, because it is at the end of “lifted from the no of all nothing.” It’s at the end of a line. Even though he doesn’t use punctuation...

MDW: 118?

DC: Yeah, 118.

MDW: I was on the wrong spot.

DC: Oh. Yeah, “lifted from the no of all nothing,” we’re in C minor here briefly. It’s a ninth chord on “nothing.” And again there’s that fifth again [sings] “nothing.”

So then we go right back, the D natural goes away and the Db comes back, and Gb comes back. Because we’re back to modulate, “human merely being doubt unimaginable You,” cadence in the new key. I think it’s pretty obvious.

MDW: “unimaginable You.” Now, the harp says we’re switching to Bb major.

DC: Yes. And that’s the key we’re in. Again, now we’re set up in the first page, by those Bb’s. So, “doubt unimaginable You,” and this is another liberty I took, because that is such a long sentence; where it’s, “How does all this,”

and then you have all of these things in between, and the answer is, “How does all this doubt you, God?” You see, it’s a very long thought and to make it clearer I inserted, “how doubt you?” “How doubt you? How doubt you?” I do it three times; the first is an imperfect authentic cadence in Bb with a third, and then “How doubt you” is on G minor, and then “How doubt you,” finally Bb again with the added sixth in the altos. So, this idea of the tonic chord with an added sixth, which is the last chord in piece by the way. I think.

So we’re in Bb now and now we’re about to transition into... So if you have a big A, and this is a big B section. I think you could make an argument that B section “I who have died am alive” is a B, and then this is a central C section, perhaps, and now we’re about to go a D section at Letter N.

So. [plays passage on piano] What key do you hear that in?

MDW: I look at this whole section as centered around... I just see the use of quartal harmony.

DC: Yeah, there is but don’t let the quartal cloud over... There are definitely quartal chords in here, all through the piece, because the motive of the fifth chord is a fourth, of course. But it’s an indefinite tonality here, if you look at Letter N with those chords, [plays chords on piano] that’s Lydian.

There’s a Bb in there. The Bb is borrowed from D minor. So it’s essentially in D Lydian which is a major mode. They you say if the mode is major or minor has to do with what the third is. So Lydian is major as Aeolian is minor. So the Bb is the flat 6 borrowed from D minor. So it’s an enriched D Lydian with

that Bb inflection. So this is all in D major, and then we go, “My ears awake.”  
 What key are we in here now? [plays passage on piano] It’s the same music  
 transposed that we had before.

At Letter O, the chord that we keep coming back [to] Bb. Yeah. We’re  
 back to Bb. But it’s Bb Lydian, because you have the E natural. And the Gb is  
 lowered sixth. [plays notes on piano]

MDW: So it’s another enriched...

DC: Yeah. Gb is borrowed from Bb minor, but it’s in Bb Lydian  
 essentially. “Now the ears of my ears are awake, and now the eyes of my eyes are  
 opened.” The modulations are happening very rapidly here. This is a point in the  
 piece where we can really... you know the modulations weren’t happening so  
 rapidly before, and in the middle section we had Db for a long time and then Bb.

Now we’re D, Bb and then we move to [plays passage on piano] F#. You  
 see? “Now the ears of my ears awake.”

MDW: Um-hmm. Yes and it’s an enharmonic relation to the harp. I’m  
 guessing it’s easier for the harp to read flats?

DC: Well, the way the harp is written, they have pedals changes. Yes, it is  
 easier for them to read flats but it depends on what they’ve come from. So here  
 they were in Bb and so the chord is... to go to Gb, F#. So, yeah, the harp part is  
 written in flats here. It’s an enharmonic modulation in the harp. But you can’t  
 look to the harp really to tell you what key you’re in. You can only look to the

harp to give you a clue, because the harp will frequently be playing enharmonically.

MDW: That's what I've come to realize.

DC: Yeah. The harp is deceptive, it's not going to tell you the key always. And those key changes that are in any harp part, they know, "OK, so I'm in Bb that means I set my pedals a certain way, and then when a new note is introduced, I have to shift the pedal and add it." When you're composing for the harp, you have to keep track, you can't just write any note. You have to know, "Can they possibly play those notes? Do they have time to change?" You know, there are three pedals on the left and four on the right. They have to have time to change the pedals. So when you're writing a harp part you have to actually have in mind where the pedals are at all times in order to know what to do.

DC: "Now the eyes of my eyes are opened." We have a new tonality. And you can probably tell what it is. The tonic tonality is always like pounded out.

MDW: Well, we came from the F# and then we have... We came from "opened" at 165, Yes? F#?

DC: F#, yeah.

DC: Yeah, notice you don't have any C#s so it would have to be a mode if it was in the key of G, and if you look at the accompaniment, you have this [plays chord on piano] G major seventh chord at Letter Q.

It ends on a IV chord on "opened." But we're in G major here. And then the men come in. It modulates, all these transitions are modulatory transitions,

and then we arrive... what key does it look like we're in now? "Now the eyes."

Again this passage is characterized by imitative entries, right?

MDW: Right. I'm looking at m. 181. I'm looking at Piano One part, and I'm saying we're in Ab major. Hold on a second...

DC: Where are you?

MDW: Mm. 181 on "now the eyes."

DC: Well wait, you skipped a key. Oh, no it's "now the eyes," yeah. Uh, no, what key is that?

MDW: Well, I'm just looking for triads that are going to give me the hint.

DC: It's a question of whether those triads are the tonic or something else. You have to kind of look at the whole field of notes, and see what are the seven note scale... it isn't always so easy, because clearly there's modes, there's chromatic inflections. This part of the piece is diatonic except for the transitions as chromaticism, but in the passages themselves when the chorus enters they're completely diatonic. So what did you say? "So now the eyes of my eyes are opened." [plays chord and sings passage] "So now the eyes of my eyes are opened."

Well, first just think of the seven notes that are there. We have a C natural, right? See, if we start on C and just spell the notes and see if it arranges itself into a major scale. C, you have a D natural, right? We're in Eb major here. And you see, you have all these dominants in the bass, like on mm. 187 [plays measure on piano].



And then at Letter S... It's interesting... So a tonality... This happens in some pieces. I didn't know this about this piece, is that a secondary tonality. We haven't been in C for a long time. If you line all these keys up in order, you'll see that they start to orbit around certain centers and that they actually do reinforce the main tonality.

At Letter S we're in Bb again. We actually aren't in Bb here. Wait a second. [plays measure on piano] No, because we have Ab's everywhere. So at Letter S we're on a Bb chord like I. But, by the time we get to the end of the phrase on "opened" Eb, yeah. We've got the same harmony on "opened" every time. It's always with some kind of IV or ii. So that's an Eb and that's through common tones. This is how we get back to where we started. At Letter T, if you look at what happens.

MDW: I'm thinking that it's in F and that the pedal tone in D is a V. It's a dominant pedal and then C.

DC: Yeah, it is F. Letter T is F and then [sings and plays on piano] "my ears awake my eyes are opened." [plays on piano]. We were in F [plays notes]. At Letter U, we're in D. "My ears awake my eyes are opened" and this climax is all in G.

This is the climax of the whole piece. You could say the last chord is chromatic. But, this is the moment right before the recapitulation. It's on a dominant pedal on the key of G, which is of course itself V of C. And we have rhythmically the most complex... you know you have really a three part rhythmic,

imitative entries. The men have one rhythm and the altos have one and the sopranos have... it's very rhythmically contrapuntal here in the chorus.

[sings] "Opened" and then here we are back with Bb in the bass. [sings and plays on piano] "I thank You God." It doesn't really settle into C definitively until we're on the word "day."

MDW: I'm looking at mm. 226.

DC: Yeah, 226. That's C major and that's where we finally come back to the first tonality. So this whole passage starting at D is moving around and moving towards C. "I thank You God" is definitely in C and then "i thank You God" it goes up to D a step for a moment.

And "for most this amazing," all those chords can be analyzed as being borrowed, or gesturing towards tonalities we've had, but not establish them. Once we get to "amazing day," we change it to C. And the last chord in the chorus is a C with an added A and D. So it's a ninth chord with and added sixth.

MDW: So it's perfectly quartal.. You have G to C you have the E to the A.

DC: Yeah. E, A...

MDW: And you have the G to the...

DC: Fourth it's true. But you have in the bottom a triad, right? In second inversion. Notice the bass is not on C yet. I'll avoid that. That is done very consciously, until the very last note.

MDW: So you don't get settled in too soon.

DC: And what should be said about this is it's really kind of a complex C major tonality, because there are all these borrowings. So, if you look, you have [plays on piano] the F# is in Lydian, right?

MDW: Where's that at?

DC: The F# in the accompaniment [in m. 227]. And then in the bass, Ab, Bb. Right? So you see, that comes from C minor. [plays on piano] So you have this kind of similar scale you have in that passage, where you had Lydian inflection and you had a b6 also, and now there's a b7 too. [plays on piano]

So you can see the scale is actually, C, D, E, F#, G, Ab, Bb, C [plays scale]. It's what in theory you call a synthetic scale, meaning it's a mixture of a couple of different things. It's clearly C major because you have the triad of C [plays chord]. And the F#, the fourth is raised, which gives it a Lydian feeling. And again the Lydian mode is very bright. But then also pulling it down in the other direction is the Ab and Bb which come from C minor, melodic descending, or natural minor.

And every chord is related to C and is moving away from it. So on a chord like on "this" you have a kind of interesting, complex... It's a Bb chord, it's flat 7; bvii to I, bvii to I [plays on piano]. But you have C major on top of that, it's not poly-tonality, it's poly-triads. You have a Bb chord in the men and then a C chord in the women. [plays the chords].

MDW: Which is why I've been having such a difficulty in analyzing it.

DC: Now you can see every... the ones that we didn't look at really close, and I don't know if you need to, is in the transitions. In some of the instrumental transitions, it's shifting and moving around a bit, but it always lands somewhere.

What conductors need in order to help them really understand a piece and learn it, and even be able to teach it... you have to know what key you're in. This is the reason why people don't apply solfège in the rehearsal, as I understand it, is that people don't know what key they're in. And if you don't know what key you're in - and this is true of almost all music written in the twentieth century, because composers abandoned key signatures - partly for convenience because they were constantly adding chromatics and inflections, and modulating very quickly. It's not even like a Beethoven sonata where you're one key and then in the development you may go through a lot of keys. What you start to see in the nineteenth century is, the composers in their central development sections, they'll just take the key signature out and put no signature so that they are free to move. And then they restore the key that the piece is in when it comes back in the recapitulation. I'm more and more trying to use key signatures because I want to show the grammar of what I'm doing. Unless it gets so hard to read because there are so many contradictory naturals, then it becomes not worth it. It doesn't mean that we're not in a key. This piece is always in a key and the form of the piece really unfolds around these tonalities.

MDW: Can I ask you just one quick question about the multi-meter in this piece? I've started looking for a pattern in it.

DC: Well, it's really about the word stress. What I would say about meter is that, when you have changing meters, it's about mixing two's and three's. So, they are going to mixed however they need to be mixed, depended upon how long the lines are. So what you have is, within a straight 4/4 is lots of syncopation, right? Or not lots, but some syncopation.

And then, contrasting with that kind of straight rhythm and meter is all the changing meters that are asymmetrical, like 7/8's and 5/8's, and occasionally, in 6/8's too. So it goes back and forth between simple and compound meter and asymmetrical, mixed meters. And it all has to do with the word stress and it's really the motives, either things are in twos or threes.

It's just how the words fit. So the accented syllables [are] on strong beats, or on strong parts of the beat, without exception. Some composers, and sometimes even myself, I would contradict that for a effect, but in the case of this piece, and most pieces, the idea of prosody is to put, just the way you would speak it. You put the strong syllables on strong beats or the strong parts of beats. And if you're in a compound meter on first eighth note of three, two can sometimes be strong, three is always weak.

I wanted to say one last thing. In terms of my music, this use of mixed meter comes from Stravinsky and Copland, specifically. And it's something I started doing in my earliest, you know like my *Invocation to Dance* which is 1986, is filled with that kind of mixed meter. And this piece is related to that metrically.

And the American poets like Whitman and, in this case, cummings; their poetry lends itself to it, I think.

APPENDIX C

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE

JANUARY 12, 2011

Veni Creator

David Conte: I'm opening up my file here for *Veni Creator*. For our purposes, would the piano/vocal be enough? Are you looking at any aspect of orchestration or is it more kind of thorough analysis in keys areas, and things like that?

Marlen Dee Wilkins: That's what I'm looking at, is the entire score. But for your analysis, that might actually make it easier, just a snapshot of the piano score.

As you mentioned, concerning *Mariner's Carol*, I think some of the most glorious moments that you've composed are found in *Mariner's Carol*. I love it.

DC: Really it is musically the deepest union of words and music, and the strongest of the three. I think it is, absolutely. It's a great poem. Again, it's using the sea voyage as a metaphor for a spiritual journey. It's just a great poem. I don't remember about Bliss Carman except that he's Canadian. But I don't know much about him and I don't know if you've found out anything about him.

MDW: I've done a little bit. It says here, "He was a Canadian born poet, remembered chiefly for poignant love poems. Also wrote several prose works on



nature, art, and the human personality. His poem entitled *Veni Creator* was inspired by the Latin hymn of the same name and is comprised of fifteen stanzas set in two sections.” You used the first section and made some textual adjustments. Changing it from “I” to “we” and there were a couple of other words that you changed. But other than that, it’s pretty much there.

DC: You know I can’t remember. So, it’s really, “I who am dust and air”?

MDW: Yes.

DC: And, “I shall put on...?”

MDW: Yeah. His original verse is, “I who am dust and air. I am thy breath.” And you adapted it to, “We who are,” and, “We are thy breath.”

DC: I forgot all about doing that. That’s interesting; it’s the only time I’ve ever done that in any piece of music. So that brings up - just briefly as a parenthetical to analysis - but on my website there’s the article from the Choral Journal, an interview with me with David DeVenney, and I talk about the “Choral ‘I,’” and about looking for texts, looking for the first person plural, like “all we like sheep.” That might be an interesting thing to bring in at some point.

MDW: So, we start at rehearsal A, which is m. 5, we are firmly in F major by all that I can tell.

DC: That is absolutely right. So you have the three bar introduction, which again just to remind you if I didn’t talk about this before in my music and the use of mixture, using harmonies from the parallel minor, so you look at the opening and you see all these flats, which suggest F minor. And then even the Neapolitan

with Gb and Eb minor, these are borrowed mixture chords in F major. Then finally, right before A, you get a plagal IV chord set up, IV-I. And IV-I has, to me, always the character of a solemn “amen,” always the religious theme to me about the plagal progression. You have IV-I and then, as you said, in A we are in F major. I’m going to tell you something and I don’t know if you can incorporate this and if you have time to listen to this; this piece is inspired very specifically by another piece of music which is Honegger, Arthur Honegger, do you know that composer?

MDW: I do. He composed *King David*, or *Le Roi David*.

DC: Yeah, *King David* and *Joan of Arc*, and those people used to be done a lot. But anyway, the second movement of his third symphony which is called *Symphonie Liturgique* - each symphony had a Latin title - and the second movement . I have to look it up. What I can’t remember - I’ve lost my score to that piece - it has a Latin name. It would be good to know that title. Here we go, it’s *De profundis clamavi*. For “out of the depths,” that’s Psalm 130. There’s a poem by Baudelaire that has that name, also. But it’s Psalm 130, ‘out of the depths.’ So what it says is, it’s a lament, which is interesting, because I think his setting doesn’t have so much the tone of lament, but the Psalmist cries to God asking for mercy in the first stanzas, then the Psalmist’s trust becomes a model for people. So, I think his approach to the text is more what is called ‘pantheistic’ and it’s a hymn to nature, to the pastoral God, not the God of judgment; that was my take on it. Honegger’s symphony is fantastic. The second movement, it’s in three

and it has this kind of harmonic rhythm of one chord per bar, very slow and really rich harmonies, and that's exactly what I was thinking of.

And then for the solo line, the saxophone line, which floats over the bar all the time, with lots of syncopation, ties over beats and ties over the bar, it definitely again - there's so much to my music that's by American popular music - not just jazz but the great pop ballads of Cole Porter and the kinds of things that Frank Sinatra sang that were arranged so beautifully by people like Nelson Riddle and Gordon Jenkins. And this was a whole body of music that was deeply influential to me and so it gives the piece the American sound, which I was going for. So yeah, at Letter A we're in F major.

MDW: Let's glance at the few chords before that, at m. 1, I had an Eb 6.

DC: [Eb] 6/5. Yeah, because the seventh is on top.

MDW: And then, I have a Db.

DC: Yeah, it's an Eb major seventh chord, then a Db major seventh chord, in first inversion. Then we go to Gb, with a passing motion to Eb minor, to Bb 6/4 in bar four, is a Bb 6/4 ninth, to I.

MDW: But that's a IV-I right there.

DC: IV9 to I. And you know the ninth chord is just something I have in so much of my work. It's like the last chord of the *Ave Maria*. Does that answer your questions about those harmonies?

MDW: Yes that does.

DC: So then at Letter A, we're in F.

MDW: And you do this a couple of times. The contrabass actually spells out the scale right there in the first two and half measures.

DC: Yeah. It's a scale and this is kind of like the walking bass you hear in popular music of stepwise motion. But then, in this kind of spacing, it also has aspects of hymn writing, and all of the parallel motion. So, we stay in F and then Eb gets introduced in, let's see, m. 8, 9, 10, 11. So when you introduce Eb, you're suggesting either Bb major or G minor. And I think in this case... so the text. Oh no, the text still hasn't happened yet, yeah, this is the introduction. I think we have a G natural minor kind of suggested starting in m. 10 until the E natural comes back in m.13, 14, 15. We're on a dominant pedal here.

Harmony can be very elusive but actually this is one of the things that's really missing so much in scholarship is showing how... Well, I would like to say - many composers who have certain connections with tradition are extending and modifying what is really the grammar of tonality. For example, in m. 15, [plays on piano], you have an emphasis on the iii6 chord, which is kind of a dominant substitute. So, if you think in F major, C is the fifth degree of scale. So instead of C E G, which would be V, it's C E A. So, can you hear my piano?

MDW: Yes, vaguely.

DC: You have [plays on piano]. You have iii to I, rather than V. This is the thing that Donald Grout said in his *A History of Western Music*, it was the standard text that was used for decades. I don't know if it is still. Did you use it in your music history classes?

MDW: Yes, we did.

DC: But, in the Baroque, we have chord progressions. In the Renaissance, we have chord successions. The difference being that progression, the drive to the cadence, there are certain kinds of root movements and very strong, up by second, down by third, up by fourth, and fifth. Moving down by third is, it wouldn't be right to say it's weaker, it's just that it doesn't have the same kind of goal directness. It has a gentler sound to it. It's more of a sonority than actually a root movement. This is what Debussy brought back into music by rediscovering the church modes, and Barber does this. I just happen to be very aware of it myself, it's a sonority that I really like. So this whole lead up going back to F major at Letter B has this emphasis on the iii6 chord. When I say that, I mean the mediant chord in first inversion.

MDW: Right.

DC: And then again, IV. At m. 18 there's a IV6/4 to I, then the sopranos enter. So they enter on the weak beat, a kind of pick up. Which I think is very much a feature of American popular rhythm, of the melody riding over a steady... It's just like in a jazz piece or a ballad where you have this very steady rhythm in the rhythm section but the melody is floating above it by moving, by having ties over beats and ties over bar-lines. So this is the exact same music, I think almost exactly, in this section. So you have this brief introduction. You have A and then you really have A again, or you might call it A1.

MDW: You know? I've looked at it and there are some similarities but I wouldn't call it the same. Actually what you've did is you gave it the exact same music to Piano One up till...

DC: Yeah, the sax.

MDW: ...from B. Yeah, the sax line. From B up until Letter C is identical.

DC: Yeah. So that's your second A. But then the cadence brings in the full chorus.

MDW: Right. Yes, it does. But the melody...

DC: Again with the Ab which is borrowed from F minor. So you have IV7 [plays chords] very blues actually. You have some of the harmonies at Letter C. I don't know why I put Letter C there; I guess because the chorus enters. You have a Bb dominant seventh in the key of F [plays chord] that's borrowed. Do you see what I mean, from F minor.

The Ab comes from F minor so it's a major IV7 that comes from the melodic descending scale [plays on piano]. The IV chord is a dominant seventh. And I know, I very consciously decided that I was going to give each section of the choir a solo as it were, and then at the cadences when they sing "we" the chorus comes in. And I do that a couple of times, right? So at letter C, we have another cadence and we're still in F major, notice with the added 6. So I don't know if you know about this chord in the second measure of C, you have an F major chord with a D in it. The altos are on D.

MDW: Yes, the added 6. I caught that.

DC: And so that's like you know Glenn Miller or the Beatles, *She Loves You, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*. The last chord has this added 6 but Messiaen uses this chord a lot. The last chord of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* I don't know if you know that work. It's one of Mahler's greatest works. It's a C major chord with an A in it. As distinguished from an A minor chord, an A minor seventh in first inversion, it's not that. It is an F major chord with an added D. It's not like a D minor chord. So that's important. So you have a firm, you know, what we say, imperfect cadence in F at Letter C.

MDW: And that's preceded by four measures of dominant pedal in the cello.

DC: Yeah, same thing. Yeah, same idea. It's the same iii6 to IV to I. And then the music could be an induction (which is used as transition now) comes back again. It's exactly the same, except that then you modulate very far away, right? So for F major, we go to B minor. It's as far away as you can get. It's a tritone. So, "Lord of the blade and leaf, sheer overlord of grief, master of doom." I think looking forward to those words, I wanted a different color. And so the D, the note of D which was the added sixth in F major becomes the third of B minor (it's one way to look at it). Although you have, right before you have a C minor chord [plays on piano] going down a half step to B minor, which is really, I think, quite unusual. [plays progression piano]

You know instead of chord IV-I, like if we were in G minor. [plays on piano] This is IV in G minor, but it's a big surprise, I think. B minor, it's one of my favorite moments. And I'm just always trying to connect my modulations to structure the new thought, the new verse, the new color, the new - in this case, we had the altos, right? And then we had the sopranos at their turn. So here we're in B minor. It's again, it's the B natural minor, right? There's no A#'s anywhere, or B Aeolian, you know... Whether you call it a natural minor or Aeolian, they're both the same. And then, there are no notes that aren't... Then, "grief, master of doom." We go into [plays on piano] D minor. Because I think we're headed back to F. Am I right? No we're not, sorry.

MDW: Not yet, not yet.

DC: We're going back to Db, this is headed to Db, how... You know, just so you know, I'm just saying this. When I compose, I am not thinking of this, I hearing it as I said. It's not like I have an intellectual grid that I've laid out. It's all based on feeling the next chord and harmony in key area just like if you were writing a poem, the next image would come to you, you know. And the way you can trust that it makes sense is because of the training of the memory, which is what Boulanger was all about. And so I am writing really completely intuitively, you could say, by feeling, based on the deep study of all of the music that I have ever known, you know.



MDW: On those lines at D, the saxophone line, did you realize that the saxophone line is slightly embellished, but it's essentially inverted from the line you gave it, back at the first A?

DC: No, it's really the contours inverted, right? It is not a strict inversion in terms of exact intervals, but where it goes instead of starting in lower and going up, it starts and goes down. Is that what you mean?

MDW: Yes.

DC: If the contour is inverted, isn't a conscious thing. It's really more - once I had the harmonies, I then, I'm making up an obbligato that makes sense that has the rhythmic character of the first idea, right, with triplets and ties and all that.

MDW: I really need to just sit down and check note for note. There are a lot of inverted similarities there.

DC: No, it's not a conscious thing. And I could tell you another music of mine where I consciously [apply this technique], you know. A technique I teach all my students is when you have strong melodic ideas you immediately sketch out the inversions, the retrograde and see if it gets you, it's what gives the work unity. But I did not do that in this case, you know, and so it's...

MDW: And then on page 22, mm. 83 and 84, if you go to what's notated as the Ab which is really a Gb-concert pitch, it's a retrograde of what we find at D. Really kind of cool.

DC: Are you talking about the sax part?

MDW: Sax part.

DC: Yeah. All of this is done also intuitively, at least by me in this piece, which I consider a gift from God [laughs]. I don't know how else to say it. The ability to do it is just... I train myself to know music as deeply as possible, that in the moment of composing it's like taking a dictation, and the dictation comes from heaven, as far as I can figure out. I don't know if you want to say that because people might think I'm crazy, but it is a... You know the last couple of lines in my interview, I think I'm able to say by training yourself in a certain way, you become receptive to the spiritual impulse that's behind all of art. You receive help from the spiritual world in what you're doing. Because that's the world of tones, that's where tones are, you know. I mean they're on Earth because they are vibrations that we can measure, but as far as an expressive language - music as an expressive language comes from this other place, you know. That's the power of music. That's why music is powerful.

MDW: That's why we're here.

DC: Yep. [laughs]

MDW: I've been studying the music and then as I looked at some of the intervals they started to look very familiar. Then as I started comparing I realized those similarities existed but I didn't know if they were intuitive or, what's the word...?

DC: Yeah, you have to be careful, I think.

MDW: That's why I asked because I didn't know if they were intentional.

DC: In doing analysis, you have to watch... a lot of our training in our culture is about intervals, and it's this kind of way about measuring things. What I find sometimes with analysis is that... You know, if you go, 'I'm going to look for patterns of the letter T in a sentence,' and you kind of abstractly impose all kinds of things about that, which aren't necessary relevant... In a general way you can say, "Conte inverts the contours of his melody in a rather free manner above a steady harmonic rhythm of harmony on each quarter, with a kind of obbligato that has certain interval shapes and rhythmic shapes that are freely inverted and transformed, in the manner of a spontaneous improviser." That really would be more accurate.

Because if you were to analyze one of my fugues, which I've written a couple, [they are] much more rigorous, conscious. One has to do that in the form fugue. You know, you stick to your subject. You have to stick to it. But Bach changes his subjects too. He uses the same shape without having the exact same notes. But in a piece like this, I think it's really useful to think of the spirit of it as being a kind of improvisation.

What you're pointing out if you see interval shapes that are inverted, is what gives coherence to the work. So it's not that it isn't relevant, but it's not a conscious, rigorous application like you're analyzing *The Musical Offering* of Bach or the *Goldberg Variations*, or something where he's put these restrictions on himself. My restrictions are different. In this case, they have to do with the texture of the piece and the way it's laid out, with the steady quarter in the rhythm

section that's in the background and whatever the chorus is singing is the foreground, and the sax line, unless it's by itself, is a middle ground, obbligato line. So we are...?

MDW: We are coming up...

DC: We are headed toward Db. We started in B minor at Letter D and then "Master of doom," we're in D minor, and then... this modulation, I don't know how I did it, but I know we're headed to Db major. That's Db at Letter F.

MDW: At F, I have Gb. Is that what you have?

DC: No. OK. This is where you...

MDW: I see a Db at m. 55, but I saw that as a V chord going to the Gb of F. But I may be off.

DC: It's the opposite, because it's a mode. This is one hardest things about... and you've stumbled upon something that's very deep. It's one of the most challenging parts of doing analysis of this kind of music, is determining whether we're in the diatonic scale, major/minor, or we're in a mode.

So in this case, it has a lot to do with what chords are on strong beats and what else is around it. Do you see how in preceding mm. 51, 52, 53, 54, we have that same figure ii-V-I, ii-V, ii-V, ii-V, which is Eb, Ab, Eb, Ab. Then I introduced the Cb in m. 54 which would lead you to think, maybe, that it's Gb but it's actually just a Mixolydian inflection. If you look at Michael Conran's thesis, he used... and mostly he used it well although maybe a little bit liberally, the concept of a modal inflection is very useful in this music. Do you see we're in Db

major with a Mixolydian inflection, which is Cb. Because if you just really listen with your body, the arrival of the phrase is on “whim,” and it’s Db. So this is how I hear it, that’s I, and at F this is IV.

MDW: Oh.

DC: [sings] IV-I. And then it goes down, enharmonically that Gb becomes an F#. It goes down by a whole step to E... which leads us to this section which leads us to this section in Letter G. What key do you think we are in now?

MDW: Let me back up to rehearsal C, m. 48 first. I saw that as being in G Aeolian there, touching on G Aeolian there for a while.

DC: Aeolian, you have a Bb. [plays on piano] It would be G Phrygian. But again, structurally where you are at this point is at a dominant. It’s a tonic, V I, “We are thy breath.” The Ab...

MDW: “Lonely as wind and snow,” 48.

DC: I’m sorry, 48. OK, sorry, I was in the wrong place. So what did you say, G what?

MDW: Aeolian.

DC: No, because you have E natural, so it would be Dorian. But it goes back and forth. So here’s an example. Again, we’re not...

MDW: You do that in the percussion. Oh, and then it changes to E natural. So it goes Eb, E natural, Eb.

DC: Yes, if you look, when you have this kind of chromaticism, we’re not in a mode. We’re in G minor and we have the raised sixths and lowered sixths,

back and forth. You can't say that it's Aeolian, because you have a natural. And you can't say it's Dorian, because you have Eb. You have both, in equal measure, really. So you have to see it in a different context as G minor. But are we in the key of G minor? We do arrive in G minor. It's true. I think it's enough to just say it's in G minor with melodic ascending and descending inflections.

Then it goes down a whole step to F minor in m. 50. And that F minor chord becomes iii in Db major. And then we go ii-V, ii-V, ii-V, IV-I. Again, it's the plagal cadence. You see, you have the same plagal movement on the arrival on "whim," IV to I, Db. And then back to IV at Letter F, but then enharmonically going down a whole step to E, which takes us to the next key area in Letter G which is E major. But you probably figured that out. It's also completely pandiatonic there [in] E major. Yes, there are only the notes of the E major scale. I'm going to have to pause with you now and go get back.

MDW: Right. So just a real quick question. On the vibes, you have B major chord inverted, is that just a dominant?

DC: Wait a second, hang on. [piano plays] I misspoke. I misspoke because I wasn't listening I was looking. It's in B major here, B as in boy. It's not...

MDW: That's what I have.

DC: And you were right. I'm so sorry. It's not E major. It's B. So there's another plagal arrival where we go down to E, that long pedal before Letter G, that's IV to I. So you're seeing, again, the composer who is working instinctively.

He's creating symmetries and coherence and the progression of IV to I is so important in this piece.

APPENDIX D  
PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE  
JANUARY 14, 2011



Veni Creator- continued / Mariner's Carol

Veni Creator

David Conte: Well, let's pick up where we left off, which was at Letter G, m. 59.

Marlen Dee Wilkins: Let's see. Yes, measure 59.

DC: So I remember I had the wrong, the B major here. And it is interesting to note that I was confused because I was looking instead of listening, that it's, again, more plagal, the E is IV. There is a way to describe this ostinato, is called a *contrametric* ostinato, because it is in two quarters in three, so it is always going over the bar. So the word *contrametric* means a pattern that is against the meter. So the ostinato... and this is a technique that sort of the Stravinsky and Bartók used a lot of, where they set up a pattern, but the chords do not change every three beats, they change every two. So you end up with a new downbeat every two measures. So ostinato comes from the Italian word for "obstinance", a pattern that's repeated.

MDW: And that's really what's happening in the vibe?

DC: The vibes start as foreground, and then they recede when the voice comes in as middle ground. It is a rhythmic idea that, again, has variety in it. It's not an ostinato because it changes, the rhythm keeps changing if you look at every measure.

MDW: That is exactly what I came to the conclusion of.

DC: So now the basses have their turn just as the altos had, and then the sopranos have to sing the melody. And then we modulate.

MDW: Let's go back to the ostinato. The harp part, I have an ostinato that takes every two measures, that's what you were saying earlier, before?

DC: Two beats. The pattern is two beats long. You see it is the same two chords back and forth, but we are in three meter, so that means it is against the meter. The harp chords are changing, their two chords. Maybe it is more complicated than that... Oh no, I see... it is every two measures, but the harmonic rhythm is changing every two beats on IV-I, IV-I, IV-I. The right hand of the harp, so to speak – is a pattern that is two bars long. And the harmony is two beats long. The ostinato pattern has the progression IV-I, three times, and then a kind of melodic, pentatonic, you know.

MDW: And the contrabass comes in.

DC: Contra bass...

MDW: The harp IV-I, IV-V, IV-I.

DC: No. There's no V, it's IV-I, IV-I. The bass of the...

MDW: So the F# in the cello is just the fifth of the I chord?

DC: That's right. And then the vibes end up doing what really ends up becoming a counter melody to the voice part.

MDW: OK, and you said there was a modulation. Where are we heading with that? Is that the question?

DC: Yeah.

MDW: We are still ostinato... There is a 4/4 measure which are just going to transition measure...

DC: Yes, the thing to note about that is, very often at the ends of phrases the meter becomes irregular, so that the arrival on the new downbeat has more meaning. So if we just had 3/4 all the way through... Even though it is not even, it is a complex 3/4, because - it is definitely 3/4. That is the way it scans, the melody, and the voices. And the prosody is in 3/4 but that extra beat gives a little lift. It supports the crescendo into Letter H, which is a modulation. Because we see now we have D naturals instead of D#'s. And I was looking at this whole passage, trying to determine what key I hear it in...

MDW: We have a two measure ostinato in the middle of this part, which is at mm. 58-59, is one set. And then those measures are repeated in 70-71, but it does not continue in the same manner.

DC: And m. 72 we go to another harmony and the question is whether it's a modulation. It's really kind of complex there. The question is whether it's A major or D Lydian, you see that's the same scale. [plays A major scale and D

Lydian mode] D Lydian, which means D with a G#. And then when the tenors come in at “lost”... No, they’ve been in the whole time, I see.

MDW: That’s when they change to the harmony. The basses go to harmony and the tenors are the melody there, unless I have that backwards. They are in unison by Letter H.

MDW: Right. But then at m. 73, the pick up to 73 they split...

DC: Two-part harmony, yes. Two-part counterpoint we could say. The way to get this answer is to keep following it to see where it goes. If you just look forward, by the time you get back to where “the first winds are stirred,” we are back to the beginning of this section, the same tonality, which is B major. Do you see the pattern is the same as it was at the beginning of the passage in the notes? So this whole middle section [pause, then sings] “re, mi, re, mi, so, re, do, re, fa.” Yeah. I think how I hear this is it starts in A major, at H, and then when the G natural comes in, in m. 72, the bass. That brings us to D major.

One of the points I’m bringing up in my lecture at ACDA is that one of the main reasons conductors don’t use solfège in rehearsal is that they don’t know what key they’re in. And that’s understandable because, particularly in twentieth century music, then their key signatures and the tonality is more complex, but it is still there, almost always, unless the piece is deliberately atonal. But that probably accounts for one percent of all the music in the twentieth century that choirs sing. So, for some reason it has been given all this attention, but in fact there is almost no atonal music in the choral repertory. Almost nothing.

MDW: Your compositional lineage goes... well, let's see. Mademoiselle Boulanger, she studied with Fauré. So, your compositional grandfather is Fauré right?

DC: That's right.

MDW: That's one way to look at it. So, it's almost as though there was a completely different path taken around the whole Schoenberg – Berg...

DC: Yes. In the French and German, the French line is also Russian, as I think I have mentioned, and Boulanger is also half Russian. The reason being, that the cultures of France and Russia were very linked in the nineteenth century, in the last third of it especially. And that's when Russian music was taking off. There's not really much Russian music before Tchaikovsky, I mean, of significance. And then the country takes off very similarly to the way America takes off in the 1920s, when Copland goes to Boulanger. So there are these threads and strains of influence as musical thought. And the Franco – Russian line is one line, and the German line is another, and I think it is pretty clear with the perspective of all those centuries that the Franco – Russian line was more productive than the German line. The German line was obviously the most productive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were dominated by Germany and Austria, to a lesser extent. You know, every big name, almost without exception, comes from that culture. Though you have some French composers in the early nineteenth century, like Berlioz and the *Opéra Comique*

composers, people like Massenet, and a whole bunch of them. But not until Debussy does the whole focus shift away from the Germans to the French.

But all the French... by the time you had this very important event in 1888 with the Exposition in Paris, which was like the World's Fair, when the Eiffel Tower was built, the *Ballet Russe* came to Paris and created a sensation. There was this kind of cross pollination between France and Russia. And the *Ballet Russe* commissioned the three Stravinsky ballets: *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*. These really important works come [in conjunction with] the *Ballet Russe*, which was a dance company from Russia.

So Debussy hears all this Russian music. The *Ballet Russe* comes and they have this huge following in Paris. And then you have the First World War. Stravinsky eventually becomes a French citizen, until the Second World War, when he becomes an American citizen. So the patterns of this destruction of war is effecting where people are working. But that's the Franco – Russian line and Boulanger is the way that it found its way to America – completely by herself, I mean she is the door.

MDW: The door?

DC: Yeah, she brings the Franco-Russian line into American music and Copland is her first pupil of renown, and he himself is a Russian Jew. So then that's the line that I feel myself very strongly to be in. It's the American line coming from the Franco – Russian line. The German line in the twentieth century, just because of the 12-tone technique – it's not that it was completely... Because

you have Hindemith who is hugely important, much more important than people acknowledge now, and people like Orff and even Richard Strauss who didn't die until 1949.

So there are certainly things happening. But you couldn't compare the influence worldwide of western art music. What the Germans achieved in the twentieth century just pales next to the French and the Russian.

MDW: The reason that I ask this question is because, and I appreciate you illuminating all this. It's as though there is such a focus on this 12-tone, this atonality, that happens along the German line. To me it's a river that just kind of ran dry.

DC: Yeah, because it is based on a theoretical abstraction. But it is important to note that there were great composers. You know it is not fair to malign the 12-tone technique. It was something that happened that needed to happen or happened for lots of complex reasons, and really great musicians followed the idea of the technique and wrote some great music. And there are composers who used the technique in their own way. There are all these examples. I mean you have Schoenberg who, most serious musicians would have to acknowledge that he wrote some masterpieces; I'm not sure if he did, for me. But Berg, the violin concerto, and then composers like Frank Martin. Do you know the Martin *Mass for Double Chorus*?

MDW: Not very well.

DC: It's pretty much in the repertory now, but it wasn't even a piece he published in his lifetime. But he is a first rate composer who is still underappreciated. But he used the 12-tone technique. And also Britten, in pieces like the *War Requiem*, and Copland and Shostakovich a bit, and Berg. It is not like the technique was completely infertile, but because it puts theory before practice in a way, it says "This is the theory - you have to use all 12 notes before you repeat them, you base the piece on all the forms of the row." So you have people writing pieces in a so-called style that can't be improvised in, that has to be calculated. And it's based on some theoretically tenuous premises.

I'm sharing with you... this is all my formation via the education I received largely at Cornell after Paris. In my own study I wrote my two theses on Copland's 12-tone music. And I actually studied Schoenberg pretty intensively just because I wanted to understand [him], because in the 70's it was almost more of a fact of life. It's not a fact of life now, I don't think, for composers. Schoenberg said that one day it will be a prerequisite for entering a conservatory, will be to show that you could handle a 12-tone row and that's not true. It may be true in Europe in some places, And it was true in American universities in a certain period, particularly the 60's, which created so much sterile music.

MDW: And that's what my observations have been, is just kind of what you said, that there is this sterile music. And if I just simply look at performance practice, when was the last time you went to any concert by almost anybody.



DC: Well the repertory of 12-tone choral music is very small. There are some pieces, some late Stravinsky pieces like *The Dove Descending Breaks the Air*, or *The Requiem Canticles*. You know there are a few Schoenberg pieces that are hardly done. There are some Webern [pieces], which is hardly done, at least in America. I don't know about Europe. It is a Tower of Babel right now, in terms of there being any understanding that there is any language among composers. I think that there is, but it is when people don't know that they are speaking a language. And if you know John Walker, and if you've ever gotten an email from him... I don't know, have you? Have you ever corresponded with him?

MDW: I have.

DC: Yeah. So he has a quote on every email he sends by W.H. Auden, the American English poet, who says, "The chief duty of the poet is to protect the language from corruption. When words lose their meaning, people stop believing what they hear." And that is exactly what is happening in music now. It doesn't mean people aren't still talking, and maybe talking to each other, but it's not with the kind of conscious that they used to, because there is just no sense, partly because the kind of moral relativism has permeated the culture that there is actually a language and a grammar.

So, these are all really deep questions, but a piece like *American Triptych*, which I think is a really strong piece, although there are things about it that I think are ... this isn't the first movement, I would say. Not musically, but in terms of that text.

Maybe I should share this with you. I sent these to John Walker and he wrote something really deep and I think you'll probably understand it. I'll see if I can find it easily, but it was a critique he had about the piece. Not as a piece of music, in terms of its technique and the compositional strength of the ideas, but it is what it shows about the understanding of God.

And, you know, I wrote it in 1999 and I just thank God a lot differently now, so... let me see if I can find this. Can you hang on just a second?

MDW: Yes, go ahead please.

DC: I sent him, "I thought you might to hear my setting. I think it is, technically, the most difficult choral piece that I have ever written, and that is because of the rhythm." It just changes meters so frequently and it moves so fast, that it's harder than *Invocation and Dance* - it's just hard. He says "It is like a glorious sunbeam that with perfect directional splendor, strikes a guy on the street, as if he were God. It's like a sunbeam that forgot where its Maker was. The focal point of the poem is the capitalized "You," referring to God. You treat that word as if it were only a minor point on your way to the amazing day this is. When the 'ears of one's ears' and the 'eyes of one's eyes' are open, it is only because one has been able to approach God as the center and final point of all existence. If "You" became the point of orgasmic climax, the "amazing day" would become the afterglow. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Mahler knew this. When you have discovered this, you will write only masterpieces. This piece stunningly beautiful, of course."

MDW: Wow.

DC: I'm sure he's right about that. So, I think that in "Amazing Day," he would say that something that I just didn't have in mind, because it wasn't in my consciousness, it is the subject – object relationship of God to man. I'm certainly praising God as a piece, and I'm praising the "Amazing Day," which is God's creation, right? No question, the piece has that feeling in it.

So, it would have never occurred to me in 1999, which I have to say is really before I was just starting to work with John. I've known John since 1981, but there were all these years where I didn't see him much, you know? And we didn't work together as colleagues at all. So I received a certain spiritual education in my association with John, and with various spiritual streams.

But this thing that I have said, I think it's a very deep thing. And believe me when John said it, I immediately had a few seconds of pride where I didn't want to believe it, and then I saw, 'yes' he was absolutely right. It's something that I continue to think about.

But there are things about *American Triptych* that are very significant to it, in terms of its length and ambition, and its vision that make it important I think. I mean I dare say, I think it is important in American choral music. I think that, no one even knows the piece, because I haven't even given it to my publisher yet, and it's a piece that's been performed only a couple of times. So your document can help.

That wouldn't be the first time in history that that happened, where it took decades for a piece to find its audience. But I think he is right about what he said. I am not sure if you can talk about that in your thesis. You have to think about that. It is something you could say is somewhat esoteric, on the part of most people who would be looking at the kind of document you are creating.

Even if I were just pulled along by John's words, they educated me and made me a deeper Christian. This is a great thing. I would have to say that writing that piece made me a deeper Christian than I was before I wrote it.

Anyway, I do think that the... these other texts, again I would say personally for me the *Mariner's Carol* is the most deep, union of words and music of the three.

Well, even though all three of them have depth, all three have organic wholeness because of my own background as a singer, and understanding the voice, and my feeling for words (I have absolute reverence and respect for words, and everything I write comes out of words). But it's true that what comes out of words can have some kind of consciousness, can be very deep.

You know if I were to write this poem now, I would probably have said it differently, you know?

MDW: OK, so we're in mm. 84, yes?

DC: Yeah, so I think we're in A major. Wait, is that where...

DC: And then when the tenors, when it goes two part writing, we go to D. And we stay there until we go back to B. In other words, there is a big arc. Do

you see in that? So much, so often how my structures work in a piece. I think you can feel the arc. There is a feeling of wholeness about this whole section which starts in B major and moves away and comes back.

The whole idea of establishing something which, moving away and then coming back to it, which is so satisfying for the human ear.

So “Where the first winds are stirred,” in m. 79, that’s where we move back with the introduction of the D#. And so we’re back in B major.

And so this big climax on J, “We are thy word.” There is a kind of very complex dominant. I mean it doesn’t look like it because there is no F# in the bass. But the F# is actually on top. Let us look at that chord for a minute.

MDW: Actually, it starts out as a B minor chord, B, C#, D, E F#, G and I was actually going to ask you about that. You have the first five scale degrees of a B chord, right there, a B minor chord.

DC: That’s right. It looks like a G major seventh and... yes, or I don’t know. Again, I’m looking at my... [piano]. This is like a ninth. You know, if you build, chords are stacked in thirds, like root third, fifth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, thirteenth. It’s really a kind of V13 chord, there on “word.” And then the D comes back in.

MDW: On 84, you’re calling that a V13 chord?

DC: I think so. Or, you could say it’s a ii... You know, it’s also a ii... Let me think; there is no A. Maybe it is really clearer for... No, arriving on ii, which

leads to V ultimately, in the circle of fifths, can be an important arrival. Maybe it's best to call that a ii11 chord.

MDW: Let me ask you this. Since that's the end of a section, I thought "OK, that's closure." And what we are starting here is an instrumental interlude (which is what I am referring to it as in my paper.) I feel it returning to I, especially where you've got all five scale degrees right there. It has a feeling of closure.

DC: Well, not completely because I don't think harmonically it is closure. It is in terms of metric arrival, dynamic, it is an arrival. [But] the piece is not done yet. It's moving. It's still unfolding, there is a period at the end of that sentence. And we arrive on a long held chord with C# in the bass. So I think if I had to do my own analysis, I would say this is a ii11 chord in B. So, harmonically, there is a lot of tension in that moment. Wouldn't you agree?

MDW: I would.

DC: Because there is a lot of dissonance. There are all these stacked thirds which make sevenths and ninths. And then you have this interlude, [then] suddenly, in m. 88, we have modulation. You have an F major chord in first inversion. The key of this piece is F, and this is how we get back its tritone of B to F. And then to G minor, which is ii. And then at K, you have the dominant pedal with that iii6 chord that we had before. And it is extended this, time a very long time. And we are back in F major really firmly at Letter K on a dominant pedal.

But again, the chord is not V, it is iii6. So you could say it's a dominant substitute that has a softer quality to it and a more complex quality than just a plain old V would.

With this ostinato, it is an A minor chord essentially, but it is iii of F absolutely, and then the voices come in and we have this dominant pedal that goes for a long time doesn't it?

MDW: It does. You have two different ostinato ideas going on here. One in the second hand of the piano, one in the harp, and on the second hand of the piano and the bass concurrently have a dominant pedal. And it actually repeats seven times until we get to L. It takes us all the way through L.

DC: And that's where we have another modulation for a moment, because Eb to Bb. It's just like the opening section. It's the same harmonic plan as the opening because the chords are the same, pretty much, in m. 106 as they were earlier. I can't remember what measure that is.

MDW: So you are saying all the way from K, which is m. 92, through m. 106 is all F major?

DC: Yes, it's all built on a dominant pedal and the main harmony is A minor, which is iii.

MDW: OK, that is what my question was. Because I was centering it, thinking it was A minor, because at m. 109, which is the fourth measure in L, there is all this focus on E.

DC: No, you are right... If you want to call this A minor, but understanding it as iii of F, which we had before, I think you are right because then when we get on “forth”, we go into A. We are really solidly in A. But now, let me just test you a bit. So 109, we have arrival on E as the dominant pedal of A.

MDW: You’re right.

DC: You could say this whole section... If you want to say A minor, I think that makes sense, just understanding that it’s iii, it’s closely related to F major, it’s a harmony from F major. Here, we are in a mode, absolutely. What is that mode?

[discussion of modes]

A Mixolydian. And then at Letter M, on “girth” we arrive at a G minor chord, right, G minor seven chord. That’s ii of F, it’s just a big ii-V-I. Well it does, no, it takes a little flirtation into this... It’s somewhat interesting because, you know again, I’ve never analyzed this and I don’t think... when I’m writing music, I don’t think about this, I just hear what I want to do.

We made up the E pedal at 116. This is a passage that... [plays piano] Yes, good. So this is a chance to bring in something that is harmonically at this moment, that is foreshadowing what is going to be in the *Mariner’s Carol*. It’s the use of the octatonic scale. This is as deep as the difference between Russian Christianity and Eastern Christianity. I think all of these things are important, and you may have to just think about them and know how you want to incorporate them. This is, again, another indication of the Russian... one of the biggest



contributions that Russian music made to the west, is this scale, and the scale started to be used... Borodin used it a little. The piece that really uses it in a really thorough way is Rimsky's *Scheherazade*. I don't know if you know that piece. There's a great orchestra piece by Rimsky-Korsakov called *Scheherazade*.

And it is a scale that alternates whole step with half step. So, E, at 116 we have an E pedal. E, F, G, G#, A#, B, C#, D, E. And the thing about it, it is a very rich scale that is effective in some ways in inverse ratio to its use. So when you get into *September Sun*, the second movement *In New York*, is based almost completely on this scale, which is one reason it sounds so tense – kind of spooky.

So at 116 we have this passage of octatonicism that in some ways it is the harmonically most ambiguous moment because we are just... I think this is a wonderful moment in the piece that, you know, people would only feel emotionally and not understand it technically.

But, so we have on the word “go” we have this unison B natural which is the raised fourth of F, right? And then on the chord “glad” we have an F major 6/4, with a ninth.

And so we finally really come home. This C major arrival with C (it's not C major), it's C in the bass, which is the fifth of F, we've had this so much through the whole piece, right?

MDW: Yes, I saw that as a Bb 6/4 chord at 122.

DC: Oh, no, I'm not there yet. I'm on “I'm glad” is at 120. That's a tonic chord of F, which is the key of the whole piece. And I really believe, I have

always expressed this every time for this piece, which isn't that often, that after the complexity of the octatonic measures that are really chromatic, this chord "glad" it's almost like clear ice water, it's just so clear, you know. Because it's just a natural chord, the ninth in the sopranos in 6/4 position, the bass is on the fifth (the orchestra and the bass). And then when you get to "free," remember we are in F major here, so "free..." I don't know what you call that.

MDW: It could be a C because of V, but I almost saw it more strongly as a Bb 6/4, which would be a IV second inversion, right?

DC: No, you have to spell through the root, you see. Again, this is where it important to understand extensions, what that means in theory is something beyond the seventh.

MDW: The reason I steered away from that is because I couldn't find a third.

DC: Let me tell you something very important, when you get into extensions, particularly with elevenths, you are not going to have the third, and the reason is, it makes a dissonance. I am going to play [piano] root, third, fifth, seventh, eleventh, ninth, thirteenth. Can you hear that? So you play the eleventh and the third at the same time, you get that. [plays dissonant interval] So extension chords, particularly when you have elevenths, the third is not there, but that doesn't mean that the root is still not C.

You know if you buy pop sheet music, you'll see like chord symbols of the song and sometimes it would say IV over V. I don't know if you have ever seen that where the bass is on V, but there is a IV chord on the top.

That's kind of a really somewhat crude way of explaining the harmony. It's not like it's a poly chord, like it's a IV and a V at the same time, or it is really a IV, but there is a V in the bass, it's a V. We are on the dominant here. We have the root, the fifth of the chord, the root doubled again, the F is the eleventh, which should resolve down to E (which doesn't in this case), and the seventh, Bb is seventh of the chord, and D is ninth. So the V... excuse me I misspoke when I said 13, it is a V11 chord.

You know what, actually look in the saxophone the vibe sounds... there is an A in there too. So there is actually a thirteenth floating around in the orchestra. And then "Earth to our mother earth." This is a very interesting moment, because the chord on earth is a V4/2 at F [piano]. I mean it's a really traditional kind of harmony, but the way I use it is untraditional. And then "Spirit to thee" is the same harmony that we had before, where we borrowed from the parallel minor of F, with that Ab.

"Spirit to thee" and then we resolve on the IV9 chord or major seventh. [piano] Bb, D,F, A right? IV7, so technically, to be really precise, it is a IV 4/3. And then it ends on an interesting sonority. I feel that last chord has a dominant feel to it because it has the root, seventh, ninth and the fifth of the chord over a tonic pedal. It ends, I think, in a way that gives a sense of mystery to the text.

And also, we're in a suite here, we're not finished yet (although any of this pieces could be performed alone). I think this piece is going to be done next year in San Francisco with a great player from Sweden.

MDW: So to end the piece at O, we are essentially on the subdominant.

DC: Yeah.

MDW: It kind of resolves back to the F.

DC: And it doesn't end on a tonic, it ends on unresolved. I just end there. I don't resolve it. Over a tonic pedal, I do this [piano], I don't have an E which gives it a crunch.

MDW: Which is dominant over tonic pedal?

DC: It just ends there. And again, in this kind of music when we've had so many arrivals on complex dominants or with pedals, it doesn't sound... the ending makes perfect sense. It would sound, if I were to do something like this [plays basic V-I progression piano]. It would sound absurd. [laughs] It would sound as if I was trying to resolve everything in the piece in some shallow way, and I think it's the right chord to end the piece on, absolutely.

MDW: I guess I'm trying to pin down exactly what you'd call the chord.

DC: It's a dominant ninth with a tonic pedal.

### Mariner's Carol

DC: I think I can tell you how I arrived at, you could say, the affect of this piece, which is in a mostly triple compound meter. We haven't had anything in compound meter yet. We have had mixed meter in the first piece which does have compound meters in it, but this piece is dominated by compound meter. So, the rocking, I would say comes more from two pieces, one by me and one by Ravel. The piece by me is *The Waking*. I don't know if you know that piece. [It was composed] in 1985.

And then the Ravel piece, Ravel wrote a *Scheherazade* as well, but it's based on the same. You know, *Scheherazade* is the story of the Arabian nights, and it's about a sea journey, and it has this rocking, this 6/8 passage is supposed to suggest the boat. And, you know 6/8 is just this idea of compound meter that... again, this is a sea voyage, and so I'm trying to create this sense of calm, the calm sea (which it does get stormy later, of course) and this sense of rocking, as you said, absolutely right.

And, you know the *Berceuse*. That's a very famous piece by Chopin. It's a musical composition usually in 6/8 that resembles a lullaby. Otherwise, it is typically in triple meter. So Chopin's is the most famous. There's also *The Firebird Suite* by Stravinsky, and also [works by] Gabriel Fauré and by Ravel. Brahms wrote his famous "Lullaby" in *berceuse*. The Chopin *Berceuse* is the most famous one. It goes like this [piano]. It had that in the left hand, the whole piece just does that, and the right hand starts the melody then has a series of variations over it. So, yes, this piece is inspired by, you could just say, the

*berceuse*, whether it's, you know, the *berceuse* that's in the Ravel *Scheherazade* or the Chopin. So, yeah, I think this piece, the orchestration of this piece is quite interesting because of the intricate rhythms, the use of the marimba, the tremolo chords in the marimba, which has this kind of spookiness. What key are we in?

MDW: OK, so this is the one I haven't had much time with. The harp says it's, "F."

DC: You know, I'm going to give you some advice on how to determine a key. Rather than looking, which is very... unless you can hear all the notes in your head at the same time (whether you're hearing them in exact pitch doesn't matter relatively), you can't really tell a key by looking. You have to hear it and then sing what feels like the center of gravity. And I think you would get it, you know.

[music]

MDW: [humming]

DC: That's it. That's the tonic. What is that note?

MDW: [Singing] I don't know.

DC: It's D.

DC: Yeah, this piece is in D, but it's in a mode. And can you tell?

Actually, if you just look at the first page, I'm seeing the first four measures in my score, just look at all the notes and spell the scale and figure out what mode it is.

You don't see any black notes, right? There are no flats or sharps, right?

MDW: No.

DC: So, if we build a D scale with no sharps or flats, what scale do we get?

MDW: A D scale with... well, that would be Dorian.

DC: Do you have any questions about the piece in general? You know what I think would be most helpful to you now is to do the formal... The piece is formally pretty easy to tell because of the text, but maybe it's just best to even notice what the big sections are, so that you know what to look for. You have an introduction which sets up this ostinato, right, which is always arriving, again.  
[plays progression on piano]

Those chords... you could say this is based on a sort of chaconne idea. A chaconne is a repeated harmonic pattern, right? This piece is not a chaconne strictly but it has a kind of a chaconne structure in the beginning, in that it states the three chords twice and then the same three chords twice again when the chorus comes in. And those chords are in D minor i6, and looking at the left hand of the piano, to v. Again, we are in Dorian so v is minor, you see? To IV, major IV. That's one of the chief characters of Dorian is the major IV chord. [piano] i6-v-IV.

So that, then the chorus comes in. "So still the night swinging, Wind of our faring." It's all the same. "Only the bows seethe to lap us." Same harmonies, we haven't had anything other than these three harmonies yet. Then, this is a big moment at 14 [where] Bb comes in. So what is a Bb in the key of D minor? Just now we are in just D minor here, you see? We have not modulated because we don't have a different tonic. We still have D, but we are kind of going back and forth harmonically by striking Bb [piano], to E minor [piano] to A minor.

“Stays and wake whispering. The thin bell striking.” So now we have C#’s and C naturals together. That’s not octatonic there, it’s just both thirds, kind of in a blues kind of way. We’re still all... all you need to know is that this is all D minor, sometimes Dorian, sometimes D harmonic minor. “And our hearts, in their blindness.” All these chords can be analyzed in D. As these are being chords from D minor, you know, melodic ascending, descending or D Dorian. “O star.”

We have a refrain. This is a carol, right, so carols always have a refrain always, or what’s called a burden. “O star shines before us.” It’s always looking for the star to guide the sea journey. “O star, shine before us,” D minor. And then we have a little transition and then we go into a new key at Letter C [piano].

So F is in the bass. This is a relative major but it’s not just F, it’s F Lydian. There is really a lot of jazz feel these harmonies I think.

MDW: There’s an F# diminished triad in the bass and tenors. There’s an E minor triad in the sopranos and altos in the second half of m. 40, when you get to the chord “us”.

DC: At the arrival, the root comes on the word “us.” You see, you arrive in the piano [piano]. Yeah so we are in F# minor here. And then we go this [piano], “is everywhere around us,” the chord with a D. That’s a D chord in the key of F# minor.

MDW: And that’s on m. 40 you were just playing? The D13?

DC: No, wait, mm. 40 is F#11. That’s the tonic. And then the harmony moves and settles at mm. 43 on a B13.



At Letter E [piano] we are at G# minor all through this passage. When you get the F double sharps, like at m. 52, that is the leading tone. This whole passage is in G#. And then when you get “O star,” this is an enharmonic change because [pauses] —this is all in G# minor. But at Letter F, I go into the parallel major, right, which would be Ab major. “O Star, shine before us” we are all in Ab here.

MDW: We have a dominant chord there as we enter into G.

DC: That’s right, and then, we have a transition. [piano]. And then we have another harmonic shift. [piano]. I’m not sure about the harmony here, but it’s a transition modulation into Letter H. We are in... I think you can tell what key it is. In a way this piece is obvious because you just have tonic pedals. So Letter H...

MDW: We are in B minor.

DC: B minor. We have a modulation [in mm.] 73, 74 and we introduce C natural; that’s a new note [sings] “The darkened dead have no peace, world without end.” So that’s G.

MDW: So we are at G at this point?

DC: Yeah, the question is whether we modulated or... We’re in the region of G major, and then on “shifting” of course... It gets... I see what is happening. What is the most likely key for B minor to modulated to, in any piece of music actually?

MDW: So if that was B minor we would be heading towards D major, yes?

DC: Yes, and that's where we through with the Bb is borrowed from B minor, the lowered sixth degree. And at Letter I, we arrived in D major on a dominant pedal. "All, all are there, and no resting."

MDW: That's a dominant pedal.

DC: Yes, "And it exults above their faces," this passage on "faces," again. [piano] Over a G... [piano]. Wait a second... [piano]. All right, so here, on "O Star."

MDW: Letter J, right?

DC: Yea, we are in G major here, but it modulates on "Before us." With the introduction of F natural, this is all over tonic pedals. So this piece has tonic pedals and dominant pedals. We have to come back to this, but just take my word, this is in G major here. The G pedal that's going on all the time is a tonic pedal with a very complex harmony over it, which leads to... You don't really get a tonic, but it's in G. And then we introduce the F natural at "Shine before us" we modulate down a whole step. Let's see, F major. Then at Letter K... uh, yeah... this is...

MDW: Pretty complex stuff.

DC: Yeah, but at Letter K though, it is completely tonal, I assure you [piano] I don't know if you can sing a tonic of this passage... At Letter K, we have this really interesting... It is an ostinato [piano]. When you see a pedal note... In this case what's the pedal at K?

MDW: Bb.

DC: So, it's a Bb pedal. The question is, is it a tonic pedal or a dominant pedal? "The horizon's perfect ring. Wind of our faring." Whereas the tonic is [sings] 'ahh'. I don't know if you can hear that, feel that, but it's Eb major, so Bb is the dominant pedal.

We are in Eb. Yeah, and then at Letter L [sings] "and we," when we add the Db, the pedal changes to Eb at Letter L right? "The first glimpse of our homing, we roll and are restless." This is the kind of complex moment where the Eb pedal gets absorbed [piano].

I hear it really clearly in the tonality. I am going to leave that a question for you for now, and we can come back. I just want to get to the end with you in just the next couple of minutes. We know we're going to come back to the home key because it always does (well not always).

There is a transition. All of this is transitional until we get to Letter O.

MDW: So from M to N?

DC: [piano ] It's so interesting to look at what I did here. You know what? Here's what I want to do, I want to leave this little part for you to look at and let's go to the recapitulation.

MDW: Which starts at O, right?

DC: So, it is a recapitulation, we're not in the home key though. Can you tell what key we are in here? What feels like the [tonic]?

MDW: It's hard for me to tell. So are we in G?

DC: Yes, we're in G minor [sings] "It is born to us", and when we move to "us" [piano] we go to B minor. We haven't a modulated; that's just iii in G major, do you see? [sings] "It is born to us." [piano]

MDW: So at O, at what you're calling the recap, essentially we're in G minor. Right?

DC: Yeah, we're not in D minor now, we're in G. Yeah the piece doesn't end in the key it begins in; now I'm remembering. Yeah, it doesn't, which is unusual for me, but at the end of a long three movement piece it actual ends, well we'll see, now I'm remembering how I ended it. What would be the logical key to end it in? Of the whole suite?

MDW: It seems like we started in C for 'I thank you God', right?

DC: That's right, and that's where it ends.

MDW: If we're in G here, that's the dominant of C.

DC: In a way, but it's the minor dominant, but you're right, it gets kind of "majory," but not completely, because all this is all in G, "The world in sight, yearning." Just for a moment you have an E major chord, which is V of ii, but doesn't really function that way. "We keep the long watches. O star." [piano] Yeah, we are still in G.

DC: [piano plays] Wait, you know, I'm saying it ends in C, but not exactly. We get the bass, the low bass note in R. It comes in on low C, right, which is the lowest note the bass has. The double bass...

MDW: Right. Yes, that plays it back at Q as well. Kind of a foreshadowing note at Q?

DC: “Star shine before us,” I was wrong. It ends with C in the bass, which is not... Well, this would be an interesting thing for theorists to ponder. Does a piece end in G... if you have C in the bass, we have C. C with an F#, what is that?

MDW: Raised fourth... that would be Lydian.

DC: Yes. [piano ] Yes, I think “O sun,” the movement “O sun” and similarly, I think you could make an argument that it ends in C Lydian, just bringing the whole piece to, you know... So, the recap is in G minor, major, it goes back and forth – it borrows freely from both. Finally the bass settles on a C, which is the fourth of G and we’ve had so many plagal movements and it stays on C for so long, for the last couple of pages.

And you have the double choir going back and forth. I don’t know if you know that there is another piece in the literature that does this where it has two choirs trading material back and forth in this kind of undulating, seamless. It’s like the choirs of the heavens, you know, just going back and forth, but it’s the end of Holst’s *The Planets*. The women’s chorus, they sing out wordless chords at the very end. You know what? That’s a great work and I think, to really understand this piece you should listen just to the last movement of *The Planets*.

*The Planets* is one of the most recorded pieces in the whole repertory. There’s probably, there must be 100 recordings of *The Planets* because it’s an orchestral showpiece. And each movement is named after a planet and the very

last planet is *Neptune the Mystic*. And if you listen to *Neptune the Mystic* you will hear how much it influenced this piece.

MDW: Can you suggest a recording?

DC: Adrian Bolt, I think, premiered the piece. And he lived to be really old but he recorded it a couple of times. You know, it was written like in 1919. And that's fine, I mean, that's a good recording.

MDW: Yes. Well, I am just so grateful for your time.

DC: You're very welcome. You see how important, really, for a conductor to understand... because a piece like this you have to understand scales and keys and chords and modes. And to determine tonics you have to do it by feeling and listening, not by looking. Unless your ear is just so developed that you can really hear it all in your head, but even then it's not always – you have to hear it in time itself, how the harmonies are unfolding over time to see is the piece in G major, or is it in C Lydian? Is this a tonic pedal or dominant pedal? I say this because it makes a huge difference. It's just like what John was saying to me about is “if God is the subject and Man the object, or is it the other way around?” To say that something is... ‘Oh, it doesn't matter, it's a pedal. It could be a tonic or it could be a dominant.’ The whole meaning of the passage is completely different if it's a tonic pedal or a dominant pedal. One is a subject, one is an object, you know?

This is helping me, I just want you to know, because when I give my talk at the convention, I need to really focus because I only have an hour. And I want to serve conductors in helping them to get sharper with their analysis skills and

applying, and then eventually pull in, if they can, moveable-do solfège to help them to teach their course in music or to get them to sing more in tune or to have more understanding of what they are singing syntactically, you know. That's really the goal of this whole session for me. And so going over this piece with you has helped me clarify some things in my thinking so it was really useful for me, too.

MDW: Well, I'm glad to hear that. This just makes all the difference in the world for me as far as how I approach these pieces and such.

DC: Yes, and also you're talking to somebody who is alive and you know, you're writing a thesis about somebody you can talk to, which if you were writing about Bach, you couldn't. Which doesn't mean you couldn't learn a lot from studying Bach, but it's a whole other thing to be able to talk to the composer. And I don't think many composers, it is not a criticism, I'm just saying, they don't really... For better or for worse, they can't discuss their music technically the way that I can. And again, it has to do with my training.

So, when I'm writing it, I'm not thinking about any of this 'Oh, now I'm going to move here.' I hear where to go and I go there. And then after it's done I can go back and look and see how my choices make sense.

So I'm writing by intuition and then I'm confirming what I've done intellectually. My practice, I can develop my theory to describe my practice, but my practice is not determined by theory, except in the more general way of like

the laws of music and acoustics and root movements. I'm speaking a language and now I'm going back and I'm analyzing that language.

But that's the most healthy way to compose. But it isn't the way people are composing now so much, unfortunately. They have way too much of one or way too much of the other. Like it's all about just feeling or it's all about some intellectual thing.

It really is a balance. "Christ is in the balance," as Rudolf Steiner said. And so, the great composers balance intellect and emotion. If you just have emotion, if you just have intellect, you don't have the complete experience.



APPENDIX E  
PHONE INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CONTE  
FEBRUARY 9, 2011

### The Nine Muses

David Conte: The text is not an exoteric text, and it is not easily understood by people, but it's a great text I think. I don't know how many people really understand Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, either. It's got a density to it that is not in poetry now really. A very nineteenth century kind of sensibility I would say.

I don't know how much you know about the reign of the archangels, but we are in the reign of Michael right now. And have been according to certain schools of spiritual science – which is different than a Gabriellic impulse. It's a different kind of quality, and when the climax (the first climax of the piece) which is “It is the Hour,” which is maybe one of the most important lines of the whole piece, is really saying it is the hour for this impulse to penetrate human consciousness, and that's in the music I think, too.

He and I had a really in-depth conversation about it in Kansas. We were both at this men's festival, and he just went through it line by line, and I wrote the piece really quite fast, I think in six weeks, but that was in July we had that conversation – I think the piece was due Oct first.

He had a really brilliant idea that I might as well tell you now because I'm thinking of it. I had originally ended the piece in the key it began in, and he said "I really suggest you consider moving it into a new, unexpected area because of the sense of the revelatory quality," and I rarely do that in my music. I usually end where I begin, for reasons of balance and just it's my instincts, but in this case, the piece ends a half step higher than it started.

It starts in Bb, which, you could say, it is like the pitch of electric current. It's also the key of so many instruments, and there's something basic about it. Not as basic as C, I suppose, but it's a little warmer. The opening is firmly in Bb, ending on m. 14 in a very complex chord, over a tonic pedal, a IV or a ii and a V together. The men have a ii chord and the women have a V, it's just a chord of extensions, but the A natural is the key note. It ends not conclusively, but fairly firmly and then it moves into Eb right away "for the sake of all that sings." It's Eb / E but it doesn't stay there. It cadences in Bb major in m. 24. So we're still in Bb, it just tonicizes IV briefly.

Then in "things of marvel," it starts to move away. But it comes back to Bb - it goes briefly to Ab, which has been forecast before by the Ab's. At Letter B we have a big arrival, at the end of the first section - in Bb.

There's then this interlude where it modulates to G major, and then goes to A at Letter C over a dominant pedal. And then it moves away from that with G naturals at m. 69, leading to the big cadence that ends this first part of this section "o dance" on a GM7 chord at B. So now, we're in G major.

It's a G Lydian, see the C# at m. 80 [at the text] "Will we gracious motion." We're still in G major. That's a IV chord on motion. It's hard to tell it's a IV, but if you look at the bass you'll see all the C's. The cadence is at Letter E, and that's just IV in the key of G.

"Glances fervent, hearts on fire," now we start to move away [piano].

[At 98] that chord is not the tonic, but it's a double-Lydian chord. It has a raised fourth and a lowered seventh on F. The way in this piece, especially, is to look at the bass line in the piano, it will tell you.

And then you have all of these imitative [entrances], "Hearts on Fire," and that F resolves to a Bb at Letter F. But it's not settling in anywhere... the next cadence is on "higher" [m. 116 / Reh G] which is A major. So it's moving around. The Bb is really like a circle of fifths, where you have a V of Bb, then you go to Bb and that is already V of Eb [with the A flats in the harmony]. But it doesn't resolve there.

"All that lifts," moves to F major. "All that lifts the body higher" F major becomes iv in A. It's borrowed from A minor. It goes F major and then d minor in the bass [right before G at m. 115]... IV – I. Then we go to A major on higher. And that's really the final cadence of this section.

So we were in Bb, and then we were in A, and we're in A again, so this whole long dance section that big E pedal when the word "Dance" is first introduced, is resolved finally here at rehearsal G in A major. It's a very long arc there of E to A. Then we have a transition again, and [with] the introduction of G

naturals of course we are moving away somewhere else until we get to the Letter H, and we move to E minor for [the muse] History.

We have a little sidestep – “arches of historical conditions, make we light of prohibitions.” We’re in E major now at the end of this passage. It’s a kind of half cadence in E major. It’s not a V chord; it’s a iii6 G# minor which is iii in the key of E. After this transition we cadence in C# major.

E major to C# major is a common tone modulation. The G# which is the third becomes the fifth of C# major. In m. 157 there is a very strong cadence on C# major. But we don’t stay there. It just is there briefly before it goes to E.

[The muse] history is really in E minor with just a major cadence at the end. This passage starts in E major on a dominant pedal (noted by the B’s in the piano). And this whole passage is in E major on a dominant pedal, but then it modulates back down again at m. 167 with the Ab pedal, which is V of Db major, which is an enharmonic to C# major.

This whole passage is in Db all the way “planets coursing under Michael’s brilliant solar power.” And on the word “power” that’s a V. It looks like is a IV chord over a V pedal, which is a kind of eleventh chord, a V11. Eleventh chords often don’t have the third in them [because the third and the eleventh clash] so you take the third out.

The piece has a lot of arrivals on dominants, and it arrives on tonics just on certain places like we’ve seen, like on the word “higher.” That’s actually the first arrival, really strong, perfect authentic cadence.

But now it shifts again “Say we, look” on an F# pedal. So this is all a pedal – a five in B major, but it doesn’t resolve to B, it resolves to G# major in m. 186. But now we have the second perfect authentic cadence of the piece, which is Ab major, you could say. So then again, we end on a V on the “ah’s.”

What happens here is very important structurally because the music of the opening comes back, but much quieter. We’re back to Bb, but we’re in Bb minor at Letter K. So when the alto soloist comes in we are in Bb minor. Then we cadence at Letter L, in G# minor. We have a cadence in 217 “strong hold on human minds” on a Cb major chord in first inversion, but we’re moving back. The passage ends in Eb major when the men come in “forthwith much that binds.”

Then this section, [the muse] Sacred Poetry, it’s very interesting what happens here. It opens in Eb then it modulates away from it. And when the soprano enters “bound to virtue,” we’re in D major. We’re in a tonic pedal. All of this is in D major. It flirts with d minor briefly at m. 245, but it goes right back to D major “Yield we up” in 247. There is again, another kind of surprising cadence. We’ve been in D major – another third relation to F major on “the sacred.”

Marlen Dee Wilkins: Could it be F mixolydian?

DC: Yes, it is. Actually it’s... this passage has lots of mixture in it... What that means is borrowing from the parallel mode, so we’re in F major, but we keep arriving on these Ab major chords, which is from F minor. But yes, the melody is in F mixolydian.

Let me tell you, there's a little refinement in this passage that's worth noting. There's actually a name for this mode, it's called double Lydian – we may have talked about it before – because you also have a B natural, you see, which is raised fourth of Lydian, and Eb, which is lowered seventh of mixolydian in the same scale.

[plays piano]

So the B natural is always present, there are no Bb's in this passage. So it's in (you couldn't have known this) F double Lydian, because it has the b7 of mixolydian and the raised fourth of Lydian in the same scale.

And that B natural is very important because going to take us to our next key, which is at m. 259. We go into C major. “As we lighten mankind's load” then we modulate again “for the sake of Humor, bold.” This is setting up the key of the fugue, which is Db. So again, we went from D major to F, and now to Db, all common tones. The A of D (the fifth of D) becomes the third of F, and then the root of F becomes the third of Db.

So at Letter O, [the muse] Epic Poetry, we're in Db major through this whole passage. And, you know, people will notice this repeated timpani Db, which is a tonic pedal that runs through the whole passage. Do you recognize that as coming from another very famous piece?

MDW: I'm thinking Brahms' *Requiem*?

DC: So this whole passage is in Db major.

MDW: Concerning the fugue – the tenors and sopranos come in on the third...

DC: It's really more correct to call this a fugato. It's also called a non-modulating fugue because the entrances aren't at tonic – dominant – tonic – dominant.

MDW: That's where I was going with that question.

DC: Yes, they are actually all in the tonic, but on different notes of the tonic chord, on iii – I – iii I. And all of those B double flats are part of a minor iv chord in Db. Once again, it's borrowed from Db minor. Borrowing means to have chords from the parallel minor scale of whatever major scale we're in. So we're in a Db major scale. Of course Db minor would most often be spelled in C# minor, but there's no need to do that here because it's only one chord, which is the Gb minor chord throughout the passage – it happens quite a bit. All those Bbb's are the third of iv. And so there's no modulation, and we have a big cadence with the high Ab at 288 all over a tonic pedal.

MDW: This is a place to me, musically, where it's the last great apex of the piece in mm. 288-294.

DC: Yes, it is. That's the place it gets the loudest. I don't say it's a flaw in the work, but on "Passion," I like the sound the chord gets, but no one is high. And again, it's a chord built on flat 6, which is B double flat.



But we're now heading back to E major. At Letter P we start on an A chord, which is IV of E major, which, where we finally cadence in m. 303. But not for long, because we're moving in Letter Q to the key of...

I don't know if you can tell what key we're in, in Letter Q? It's hard to tell. You can see the pedal is one of only two types. They're either dominants or tonics.

I hear this passage as in Ab with a dominant pedal [plays piano], which makes it Ab mixolydian.

[Discusses modes]

So the way I hear this passage is in Ab Mixolydian with a dominant pedal. But then it moves away. It doesn't settle anywhere until we finally get to "now filled with grace."

[Discussion]

F# is the lowest note. So if you build a scale over that of the notes that are in the passage, you see that you get F#, G#, A#, B, C#, D#, E, F#.

MDW: So that would be Mixolydian?

DC: Yeah, it's F# Mixolydian.

So the question is if you hear the last sonority as unresolved, or resolved. The bass keeps repeating F#, F#, F#, and it ends on F#. The piece ends up ending on this F# ninth chord, with the G# and the solo quartet singing F#, C#, E, G#. So the end of the piece is inconclusive in a way. You either have to say it's F# Mixolydian or it's a dominant pedal on B. You see that the F# Mixolydian and the

B major scale are the same – they're the same seven notes. It's just a question of what note is the center of gravity.

In hearing, people do hear differently. This is one of the big challenges of hearing and understanding all twentieth century music. Is whether it's modal, or tonal, or both, or a mixture, and are moving back and forth because the tonality can be established through length, and through repetition and duration. If you have one pedal tone lasting a long time, at what point does it start to sound like a tonic?

So we've had this piece that is fifteen minutes long where you have these pedals all throughout the piece, which are sometimes tonics and are sometimes dominants. And so your experience at the end, even unconsciously, is related to what happened before, every time we had those pedals. Did they feel like tonic, did they feel like dominants? We seem to have lots of dominant pedals in the piece. On the opening we have a tonic pedal, but most of the pedals are dominants. In fact, if you look through the whole piece the only other tonic pedal is in the fugue. All the rest of them are dominants. So at the end, this passage is constructed similarly to other passages in the piece. Does it end on a half cadence in B major (which is a half step higher than where it started), or is it in F# Mixolydian? You can leave the question open, I mean it's part of the mystery of tonality. I think all that matters is that a certain emotion is conveyed of relative stability. At the end there is a somewhat peaceful calm feeling because of the colors and the softness of the music.

See what happens in music, starting with Wagner, really, in the most all-pervasive way, is he is constantly arriving on dominant pedals. They'll set up their dominant pedal and as soon as it arrives on that note (tonic) he introduces the seventh, which makes that chord immediately another dominant. And by doing that he is able to sustain these very long structures because he is never arriving, and he can keep all the tones active and alive and moving. Wagner does that – the piece to really see it is the *Tristan und Isolde* prelude. If you start to look at Debussy, a piece like *Prelude to the afternoon of a Faun*, he's doing the same thing. That's how these composers are able to build, or to get continuity in pieces and also to get the pieces to keep unfolding and keep moving, till they finally come to rest.

In the case of this piece, it doesn't end on a strong cadence at all – it hangs in the air. [It creates] this feeling of eternity. It remains a question and an echo of space, and it's not bound to the earth. It's kind of heavenly – as is appropriate to the text. I hear it ending on the dominant which gives it an open-ended... it's not earth bound.

The tones evoke a certain emotion and feeling by their relative degree of stability or instability. The composer is a dramatist of tones. He is using tones the way a painter uses colors, and the way a poet uses words to express ideas and to convey emotions. Every scale has its affect, both relatively and absolutely. So any piece that's built basically out of a major scale has a certain affect to it, and F# major is not the same as Eb major. They're the same relatively, but not absolutely.

And so that's why the changing of keys can be so tricky sometimes, although we know there's so much of the great song literature was published in several keys.

You see, clearly there's a grammar of the piece that's being communicated by the relationships. Not necessarily by what tonality they're situated in.

One can be sensitive to tones in a kind of general way, or even on the pure level of emotion, and not at all on the level of intellect. The labeling we're doing is important. It's like diagramming sentences, and sometimes it reveals what is really interesting about a sentence is whether it has a certain construction. And the words are in a certain order, and they make their own effect, and it's the same with notes.

The challenge of the piece, as I said in my interview and notes, is how to create a long arc that corresponds to the poem – that is from beginning to end, without pause, really. I think the musical form fits the poem exactly.

MDW: I think to a certain degree, that the way the text and the music meld together are, in part because of the close collaboration that you and John have. I don't think I'm going out on a limb by saying that.

DC: No, not at all.

APPENDIX F

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH JOHN STIRLING WALKER

FEBRUARY 11, 2011

### The Nine Muses

Marlen Dee Wilkins: How did you come up with *The Nine Muses*?

John Stirling Walker: A long standing interest in Greek civilization and the sensibility that can be associated with the myths and legends of that culture.

MDW: Did he just call and say “I need a text?”

JSW: Yeah, basically, and then we ended up discussing this idea, and the decision finally to work on it with that theme, at a gathering in Kansas, which is a yearly men’s gathering in the countryside in Kansas near Leavenworth, where we discussed the idea at length and really developed it thoroughly in terms of the intentions of the piece and the like.

MDW: What were some of your ideas? Is there an order or hierarchy in the order you discuss *The Nine Muses*?

JSW: Good question. It really is formulated out of what is supposed to be a sense of drama, of unfolding colors, and feelings and dynamics and thoughts that have an organic relationship one to another in the order that they’re placed. So it’s written with a consciousness of certain ideals of form that David Conte and I have been discussing since I was 18 and he was 25 at Cornell when he was a grad student and I met him as undergrad there and discovered his studies with

Boulanger. And for 30 years we've been engaged in this kind of conversation as close friends about what we really care about in art.

So this work, like our others, is definitely consciously-shaped out of certain ideals we share about the nature of form and how we shape elements of form in a way that produces what we consider beautiful. So the sequence of the muses in that case, in this text, had to do with a sense of a certain, as I said, drama unfolding that we were reaching for.

I guess the climax is really, or what we thought of as the climax was the moment where we talk about the power of the sun and Michael – the radiant power of Michael. That image was supposed to be the (at least in our feeling) was like a center, or a central moment around which the rest revolves. So we look at “it is the hour”, at that point in time. The other place that I would have considered, at least the musical highlight, or at least another high point, would be epic poetry.

MDW: So in the case of [the muse] “music?” These “mighty, glorious, wondrous things that no mortal finds an end for” – that’s the result of this being’s efforts?

JSW: Right. That’s exactly the consequence of their intention and the way it directly (in the case of music) comes to be expressed as a love for humanity.

[Read aloud stanzas II - Dance and III - History]

MDW: “Make we light of prohibitions.” Can you elaborate on that phrase?

JSW: The nature of these beings in the way that I was envisioning them for this poem is that they, as divine beings, seeking to serve humanity's development out of selfless qualities of love and creativity and sacrifice, they 'don't truck with' human conventions of thought. And so what human beings consider right or wrong, or good or evil, out of their own efforts to understand such things in the cosmos, is of an order that these beings are far above. And so they 'make light' in that sense of man's prohibitions against his fellow man that result in conflict. People are trying to impose things upon one another by force; prohibiting this, prohibiting that, out of their idea of the good, or bad, or evil. And then they find themselves in conflict with other human beings who don't want that imposed on them, or don't agree about what's good or evil.

These beings transcend all of that entirely. So they make light of such prohibitions, not in the sense that they scoff at them or mock them, but they're just simply above it.

[Read aloud stanza IV - Astronomy and Astrology]

MDW: How would you define the connection between this solar power and Michael?

JSW: This is really the moment in the text where I'm consciously linking pagan traditions of myth, mythology – as we like to think of it, or legend – to Christianity and Judaism. So Michael is not a Greek God, he is an archangel. His name in Hebrew means "Countenance of God." And so there's just that moment in the text where I'm consciously trying to make a link between the beautiful



spiritual traditions of Greece and the very differently beautiful traditions of Judeo Christianity and the Hebrew language, from which those spring. So Michael is “Countenance of God,” and he’s spoken of, in some contexts, in his radiance, like the light of the Sun.

MDW: “Look, it is the hour.”

JSW: That’s this moment where we’re linking the two streams of human experience from spiritual sources that are different.

MDW: Does that have a direct scriptural reference?

JSW: Well, it definitely is from the scriptural statements to that effect. “Behold, I say unto you”, for example, at the annunciation of Mary. Michael’s brother archangel, you might think, uses the same language (they speak the same language). “Behold” is often used in context where some revelation is being given.

I’m not sure that it is. There must be somewhere before I wrote it there, obviously, but I didn’t have a conscious source of quoting it or anything like that.

No – wait. I do have a connection which was more conscious than I was just remembering...

Goethe. Goethe has a work called *Fairy Tale*, and it didn’t have any other title, but he wrote this lovely fairy tale telling the story about a kind of transformative, magical experience that beings in this magical world have, who are working together to try to solve a problem (that has to do in the magical fairy tale world he created) with the lack of a bridge across a river between two realms.

So these various beings, like a lily, who is like a princess, and a green snake. He created this lovely set of images in his writing this fairy tale having to do with fantastic fairy tale characters who work together to create a bridge across a river that's desperately needed by humanity. There's a certain moment in that fairy tale where one of the characters, an old man with a lantern leans over and whispers into the ear of the green snake "it is the hour." He doesn't actually use the word "hour" in German. "The time has come," actually. That's the actual German literal translation – "The time has come."

And I remember that David and I talked about that moment in Goethe's fairy tale as a kind of parallel to what I was trying to say in the text that moment. Not the exact words, but that sense that declaring that this is the moment when everything we long for together can begin to occur. So there is that conscious connection to someone else's work that I realize I also talked with David about.

[Read aloud stanza V – Tragedy]

MDW: Why tragic tales? What is the binding? Why the stronghold on human minds?

JSW: The binding has to do with (in the idea I was working with) these tales of tragedy like Hamlet, or Romeo and Juliet for example, or any of the Greek tragedies, or any of the great literature that revolves around the suffering of humanity in some central way. Those tales, those stories have a stronghold on the human consciousness, evidently, in ways that result in our considering works of tragedy central elements of greatness in our civilization. So the stronghold on

human minds, had by travail, by suffering, by trials that human beings go through results in according to this vision of these beings in this case in a certain impulse within them to write, to inspire the kind of writing about the kind of depiction of tragedy, that results in humanities moral consciousness being heightened – which is what Aristotle said tragedy was supposed to do in the first place.

David and I, as you may know from things he may have said to you as well, we've shared, ever since we met a certain feeling deeply that the culture is declining, or declined, and there isn't a very strong moral sensibility in art. Where the moral sensibility is in art, or addressed, it is often experienced as preaching or some kind of bad art, because it is redacted. Whereas, in an older sensibility of the culture one could convey ideas or ideals of virtue, for example, through ones artwork, without it being considered somehow preachy because people really were thinking as part of the civilization itself. It seems more normally it was part of the culture's ethos to be concerned about such things, and to have art to be part of the human struggle to understand them – virtue, tragedy, and why good people suffer. But the sense that David and I share that the culture is declining, and needs to be, wherever possible, creative activity by artists, that revives or renews our sense of the moral in art, without letting art ever being taken over by some desire to teach some particular principle, which is a certain kind of art – I'm not criticizing that kind of art either, but we're interested in the kind of art that reveals moral qualities just in the nature of things, not that tries to teach some particular lesson we ourselves think is good for anybody.

And so the idea that there is a kind of inspiration beginning to happen is part of the vision here that people can start to write again about tragedy and suffering and crime and punishment – all these things that are so fascinating to people nowadays it seems with all the court shows and police shows and things. That we could start to learn from the artwork that's produced by artists more and more we're hoping you could say. Hopefully there could be a revival in the sense that when we depict tragedy if we're doing it in a progressive way that really is furthering aesthetics, then there's a way for that experience of tragedy from the person in the audience, for example, to elevate them morally – to give them a sense of something, in that sense, that binds them. Not binds them by some force.

I talked earlier about humanities way of dealing with good and evil and prohibitions (of which these beings make light). Not that kind of binding where you feel bound because someone told you, but bound in a deeper sense that you come to see something is truly good, and just because you see it is truly good you feel bound as a person to pursue that higher thing. That kind of binding is what was being referred to.

[Reads aloud stanza VI - Sacred Poetry]

There's actually another climax there obviously that you could say is another competitor or something to the one that I already talked about around "this is the hour." "This is the hour" is the moment around which the rest of the piece was structured – but that moment with offering up the sacred there's a moment of sublime beauty there that David created by setting the text the way he did that I

guess he would agree, in a certain sense, is the organic climax that results in the whole piece, from the work we did – consciously starting with that “This is the hour” moment as a thing around which everything revolves.

MDW: Is there a personification of Dawn in “Dawn pours out her holy light”

JSW: It is a personified Dawn, a sense of Dawn as a goddess in her own right.

[Reads aloud stanzas VII - Comedy and VIII - Epic Poetry]

MDW: This grandeur and passion is associated with poetry.

JSW: It’s like comparing the Taj Mahal casino in Las Vegas with the actual Taj Mahal. The actual Taj mahal was created out of daring passion, indeed, right? It’s one of those works of beauty that testifies to what the human being is capable of when they’re inspired in a way [when they are told by others] “Oh, no. That will never work.” Daring passion. But then we’ve got that kind of copy of it in Las Vegas. It’s really only there as a kind of fashion statement about what’s supposed to be beautiful.

[Reads aloud stanza IX - Lyric Poetry]

MDW: Talk to me about that a little more.

JSW: It takes courage to overcome. When a culture declines, it becomes enamored of convention. It starts to accept things as beautiful just because that’s what people used to do... It begins to accept judgments about what is beautiful based purely on past authorities rather than any kind of real inspiration living in

actual courageous artists. Artists are always, whenever they are creating art that is furthering civilization, creating new forms. We can think of Beethoven in his time, and Stravinsky in his time. It requires courage exactly of a very high order. And so it is the courage filled that will redeem whatever can be or needs to be redeemed in our civilization from this tendency that it's, like any declining culture, fallen into to accept authorities opinions about what's good or what's beautiful without having any real sense of it oneself. So, "killed by theory," meaning academic theories about art, or religious theories about redemption. Our sense of ourselves as spiritual beings (in that way David and I are often talking this way with other colleagues we are working with) is in a way, motored by acceptance of authority in theoretical ways, or in purely fashionable ways, as I said a moment ago about the other verse. Lace, decorating things and making them look pretty – nothing against lace, per se.

And it's the courage-filled who can bring back, or bring forward in new ways that have never been there before, authentically inspired forms that are filled with a beauty that really does come from the heartfelt experience of artists and of the people they're trying to reach – the heart-felt experience of what beauty is, rather than just an acceptance of tradition or authority, and those forms are filled with grace. We would say they represent forms that had been inspired by powers that redeem, if one believes in powers at all as anything other than psychological construct.

I wouldn't talk the way I talk if I hadn't had David as my tutor when I was 18, sharing the way that Boulanger helped him formulate his own ideals and find a way to express them. So there's really like a discourse that's gone on between me and him for 30 years now that goes into these things quite deeply whenever we work together.

I suppose you're also aware of our work together. We've written two operas together and we're working on a third. I mention our [operatic works] because of the character. The conversation we've just been having about character of these muses and what I was thinking about myself, as a writer, and what David and I were talking about and how he ended up embodying them in music. That's the kind of conversation we've also had in this same kind of detail and depth about the characters in our operas, and I thought I should make that connection also explicit because we are so interested in this question also of characters on the stage. Whether we're writing something for a chorus and orchestra, or soloists, or whether we're writing something actually for the stage we're interested in the same questions and ideas about character - the character of a melody, the character being portrayed by an actor. The character of a thought, how the character of things is being shaped artists consciously in order to produce a certain formal quality through the organization of a piece. Those are also elements of our stage work. I felt like they also deserved to be mentioned in connection with this.