

PROGRAM NOTES

I first encountered the text of this piece in a Christmas card made by the Holy Myrrbearers Monastery, where it was mistakenly attributed to Gregory of Nyssa (an attribution repeated throughout the world wide web, presumably by other recipients of their beautiful card). From my first reading, I was struck by the beauty and power of the text and wondered how I might set it to music. I had other projects to complete, however, and I set it aside for several years. It was not until the summer of 2009 that, exhausted by more than two years' labour on my setting of the Seven Last Words from the Cross (which I had finished just in time for its performance by Camerata that April), I found myself wanting to write short pieces on more cheerful subjects. This text sprang immediately to mind.

Stylistically, this piece is quite different from anything I had written before it, and from anything I am likely to write again, but I hope it offers at least a faint echo of the deep beauty of Gregory of Nazianzus' text.

—Tawnie Olson

TEXT

O Inexpressible mystery and unheard-of paradox!
The invisible is seen; the intangible is touched;
the Eternal Word becomes accessible to our speech;
the timeless steps into time;
the Son of God becomes the Son of Man.

—St. Gregory Nazianzen (c. 329–390)
(translator unknown)
Christmas Oration

Tawnie Olson

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www.tawnieolson.com

O Inexpressible Mystery

for SATB Chorus (divisi)* and Viola

St. Gregory Nazianzen (c. 329–390)
 (translator unknown)
 Christmas Oration

Tawnie Olson (b. 1974)

Rapturous and slow ♩ = 60

p → *ppp*

div.

Soprano
 O!

Alto
 O!

Tenor
 O!

Bass
 O!

Viola
mp cantabile

Piano
 (for rehearsal only)

* The tenors do not divide.

6 *pp unis.* 3
 O in-ex-pres-si-ble mys-te-ry and un-heard-of par-a-dox! The in-
pp 3
 O in-ex-pres-si-ble mys-te-ry and un-heard-of par-a-dox! The in-
pp 3
 O in-ex-pres-si-ble mys-te-ry and un-heard-of par-a-dox! The in-
pp 3
 O in-ex-pres-si-ble mys-te-ry and un-heard-of par-a-dox! The in-
mf 3
 3

10 3 *p*
 vis-i-ble is seen; the in-tan-gi-ble is touched;
 3 *p* 3 *pp*
 vis-i-ble is seen; the in-tan-gi-ble is touched;
 3 *pp* 3
 vis-i-ble is seen; the in-tan-gi-ble is touched;
 3
 vis-i-ble is seen; the in-tan-gi-ble is touched;
 3 6
 3 3

13 *poco cresc.* *mf*

the E - ter - nal _ Word _ be - comes ac - ces - si - ble to our speech; the

p poco cresc. *mf unis.*

the E - ter - nal _ Word _ be - comes ac - ces - si - ble to our speech; the

p poco cresc. *mf*

the E - ter - nal _ Word _ be - comes ac - ces - si - ble to our speech; the

p poco cresc. *mf*

the E - ter - nal _ Word _ be - comes ac - ces - si - ble to our speech; the

6

17 *poco rall.* *f*

time - less steps in - to time; the Son of God be -

f

time - less steps in - to time; the Son of God be -

f

time - less steps in - to time; the Son of God be -

f

time - less steps in - to time; the Son of God be -

f *poco rall.*

A tempo ♩ = 60

poco rit.

21

p dim. *ppp*

comes the Son of Man.

p dim. *ppp*

comes the Son of Man.

p dim. *ppp*

comes the Son of Man.

p dim. *ppp*

comes the Son of Man.

mf poco dim. *p*

A tempo ♩ = 60

poco rit.

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Review

O Inexpressible Mystery

Tawnie Olson

(b. 1974)

Rapturous and slow ♩ = 60

4 *mp cantabile*

8 *mf*

11

15 *poco rall.* **A tempo** ♩ = 60

19 *f*

22 *mf poco dim.* *poco rit.* *p*