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PROGRAM NOTES

Mark Twain wrote *The War Prayer* in 1904–05 to protest America’s involvement in the Spanish-American War. His family convinced him to keep it from publication, fearing it was too controversial. It was published after his death. Twain made the case that if God causes all things to happen and blesses select people, then He must also, willingly, deny others his blessing. It is the other side of prayer, the unspoken side, which Twain so brilliantly characterized in *The War Prayer*. It is not my goal to demean anyone’s faith or enter into a theological debate. I see Twain’s essay not as an indictment of religion, but as an impassioned anti-war statement, the kind of which will always have resonance. Those familiar with this work will recognize the astonishing liberties taken in adapting it. Whole passages were cut, phrases were moved around and words were deleted or replaced with my own, all in the interest of concision, storytelling and the considerations one makes when fitting words to music. But the essence of Twain’s tone and message has not been altered.

—Steven Mark Kohn, 2013

AVAILABLE EDITIONS

Low Voice and Piano	8671
Medium Voice and Piano	8672
High Voice and Piano	8673

TEXT

It was a time of great excitement!
The country was up in arms and every breast burned
with the holy fire of patriotism!
Drums were beating, bands were playing,
and all down the street as far as the eye could see,
a fluttering of flags flashed in the sun!

Every day the young volunteers
marched down the wide avenue
gay and fine in their new uniforms!
The proud mothers and proud fathers,
proud sisters and sweethearts,
cheering them with voices choked with
happy emotion as they swung by!

Every night the packed meeting houses
echoed with the sound of patriotic oratory,
which stirred them deep in their hearts,
and was greeted with waves of applause,
bringing tears to their eager shining eyes!
It was a grand and glorious time!

Sunday morning came. The church was filled.

The minister delivered a prayer
such as none had ever heard before.
He beseeched the ever merciful loving father of us all
to watch over our noble soldiers
and aid, comfort and encourage them
in their just and righteous cause.
Bless them and shield them
in the day of battle and hour of peril
Bear them in his mighty hand!
Make them invincible!
Grant honor and glory
to their country and flag!
Amen.

A reverent pause came over the whole congregation.

In the silence, a strange old man entered,
and with slow and noiseless step moved up the aisle.
Taking his place at the altar, he turned
and spoke to the congregation.

“I come as a messenger from the throne of God.
He has heard your prayer and is prepared to grant it.
But He wants you to know your prayer has two parts.
We have heard the first part
as uttered by your servant in this hall.
I shall now tell you what you have silently asked for.

Oh, Lord, our Father,
our brave young men go forth to battle.
Be with them, Lord.
Be thou with them,
as they stray from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides.

Help us, Lord, to drown the thunder of their guns
with the shrieks of their wounded.
Help us cover their smiling fields
with the pale forms of their dead.
Help us lay waste to their homes.
Help us wring the hearts of their grieving widows!
Turn out their orphaned children
to wander the wastes of their ruined land
in rags and hunger and pain!
May they be broken in spirit,
imploping Thee for mercy and denied it!
Blight them!
Help us destroy them!
We ask Thee, in the name of love!

Ye have prayed it.
HE has heard you.
If ye still desire it, speak.
HE is waiting...”

The War Prayer by Mark Twain
(Samuel Clemens [1835–1919])
Adapted by Steven Mark Kohn

The War Prayer

for Low Voice and Piano

The War Prayer by Mark Twain
(Samuel Clemens [1835–1919])
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Steven Mark Kohn

With robust patriotic furor
♩ = 126

ff

It was a time of great ex-cite-ment! The coun-try was up in

With robust patriotic furor
♩ = 126

f

arms and ev - ery breast burned with the ho - ly fire _____

of pa - tri - o - ti - sm!

10 *f*

Drums were beat - ing, bands were play - ing, and all down the street as

mf

14 **A** *ff* 3

far as the eye could see, a flut - ter - ing of flags

f

Ped.

17

flashed in the sun!

Ped.

20 *f*

Ev - ery day the young vo - lun - teers marched down the wide av - e - nue

sf *mf*

23

gay and fine in their new uniforms! The proud mothers and

secco

26

proud fathers, proud sisters and sweet hearts,

gliss.

29

cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung

33

by! Every night the packed meeting houses

mf sub.

mf sub.

r.h. trill

37

ech - oed with the sound of pa - tri - o - tic

39

passionately

or - a - to - ry, which stirred them deep in their hearts,

passionately *legato sempre*

41

cresc. poco a poco

and was greet - ed with waves of ap - plause,

cresc. poco a poco

43

bring - ing tears to their

45

ea - ger shin - ing eyes!

47

ff *rit.*

It was a grand and glo - rious

f *rit.*

50

A bit slower and more broadly *rit. molto*

time!

A bit slower and more broadly *rit. molto*

ff

52 Slower ♩ = 60

fff *f*

Ped.