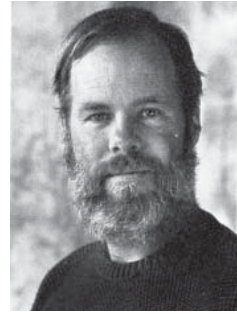


Words to Music Composers

Christopher Frye

Composer Christopher Frye was attracted to the poem *Fire Flies* because it evoked immediate musical ideas relating to how fireflies (lightning bugs) randomly glow in the evening. He also found the ideas of high and low, right and left which are expressed in the poem to be very musical. Chris developed most of the vocabulary and structures of *Fire Flies* in his head initially, limiting his pitches exclusively to those of the Bb melodic minor scale. He then worked out the complete piece in manuscript before notating it on the computer. Since some of the ideas in his music are “indeterminate” he had to work around many of the constraints of traditional notational standards built into most notation software. A veteran Words to Music composer, Chris said “I consider the poetry and music that has been created over the years for of the Words to Music program to be some of the most beautiful, creative and genuinely inventive works I have read and heard. I am always very honored and proud to be able to contribute music to the project.”



Dr. Frye teaches Music Theory and Composition courses at UW-La Crosse. He also plays piano professionally. Chris and his wife Cheryl, who is also an educator, have three sons ages 27, 26 and 24. If you would like to hear other pieces that Chris has composed go to www.uwlax.edu/music/frye/fryehome.html.

A. Eric Heukeshoven



Just Believe is Eric Heukeshoven's 8th Words to Music commission. Eric was immediately drawn to "Just Believe" for two main reasons – one practical and one whimsical. Practically speaking, the repetition of the phrase, "But I do, and you do" allowed the composition to have a recurring theme linked to this phrase. The general whimsical nature of the poem – "Most people don't believe in the existence of fairies," for example – sets the light and playful nature of the music. *Just Believe* was written entirely at the computer. Eric reflects on the composing process: "We all compose in our head, but sooner or later we have to get our thoughts onto paper in order to share them with the world."

Eric is a member of the music faculty at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona. Several of his choral compositions are in the Alliance Publications, Inc. catalog (apimusic.org), and a number of his instrumental works are available on ScoreExchange (www.scoreexchange.com/profiles/aeH). His wife, Dr. Janet Heukeshoven, is the flutist for the Chamber Chorale performances of *Just Believe*, and is also his colleague at SMU where she oversees the music education program, conducts the Concert Band, and teaches flute. They have two sons who are also excellent young musicians – Hans (21) is a percussionist and Max (15) is a double bass player.

Patrick O'Shea

When Composer Patrick O'Shea seeks a poem to set, "I'm always looking for imagery or words that suggest musical gestures to me. There is very rich imagery in *Gravity Defied*. Some of the more striking images included 'opening huge wings,' 'twisting and turning,' and 'falling and rising.' I also found the last line of the poem, 'freedom inside,' a compelling and somewhat surprising ending." This is the sixth piece Patrick has written for the Words to Music project. "Words to Music is a fantastic project, and I'm very glad to be associated with it. This past July, I did a presentation on it at an international symposium on choral/vocal music at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada."



His process for composing a choral piece usually begins with rhythm. Patrick speaks the text, and meditates on its rhythmic implications. Then, he sketches rhythmic ideas – usually in the margin, next to the poem itself. After he has some ideas of rhythms that serve the text well, he considers the larger structure (whether sections will repeat or be related to other sections, where there will be similarities and contrasts in the form, etc.). Next, he considers melodic ideas, working with the rhythms he's sketched already. Finally, Patrick fills in harmonies and accompaniment figures to "flesh out" the texture, and adds dynamics and other interpretive markings where needed. All of the sketching stages are done with pencil and paper. He doesn't start entering things into the computer until he has a pretty good "skeleton" of the work. "I find that, for me, writing things at the computer results in things that are easy to write at the computer - not necessarily my first (and usually best) reactions to the material." To hear works composed by Patrick O'Shea, go to www.poshea.com.

Dr. O'Shea directs choirs and teaches voice and music history at Saint Mary's University in Winona, Minnesota. His wife, Lindsay, is also a music instructor. They have two daughters, Genevieve, who is almost 3, and Veronica, who is just over 1, and are expecting their 3rd child in late March.

William Sisson

Bill Sisson enjoyed the images in Lizzy Jerzak's poem *Magic*, and her redefinition of "magic" as some of the everyday things in life we take for granted, rather than "pixie dust" and "making things disappear." He describes his approach to composing as "unprofessional and unstructured," and explains, "I write in bursts when there is time available, most often over the summer. I also tend to write when I'm asked to write something, rather than suddenly feeling the need to put notes on paper."



In the case of *Magic*, there was a deadline of about three weeks, which for Bill was an excellent motivation. "After picking the poem, I let it rattle around in my head for a weekend, and came up with two building blocks: the word 'magic' as a descending second, either major or minor, that would tie the piece together; and the instrumentation: piano in a consistently higher register, with solo clarinet and French horn. Once that was done, I wrote straight through, sketching chords or tunes on paper, then transferring them into the music engraving program Sibelius. I've lived with that software for a long time, so I'm very comfortable moving around in it. Once the piece was finished, I went back and revised over and over, ten or twelve times. I wasted a lot of paper!"

Bill teaches orchestra at Logan High School and Emerson Elementary School in La Crosse. He also conducts the La Crosse Community String Orchestra, which meets on Wednesday evenings during the school year. He has been married to his wife Cathy since 1990. Their daughter Megan (who plays violin and guitar, and swims faster than Bill can run) graduates from high school in May.

Bill tries to write music that is useful to musicians he works with. You may hear a piece that he has written now and again sung by your church choir, or performed by a local middle or high school band, orchestra or choir.

Gary Kent Walth

Composer Gary Walth chose the poem *Vanish* because it had a good “rhythm” to it and it had a story to tell. Also, he’s attracted to one word titles and simplicity. When Gary sets a text or poem to music, he studies the words for content, meter and pulse, and an image that the words might display.

He then tries to envision a melody or thematic scheme that represents those characteristics. Gary uses Finale computer software to notate, playback and print the actual musical score. This is the sixth or seventh piece Gary has written for the Words to Music project. “I want to thank the La Crosse Chamber Chorale and their conductor Paul Rusterholz for giving both composers and young poets this unique chance to have our voices heard.”



Dr. Walth is the Director of Choral Music Studies at UW-La Crosse. His wife Cathy is a RN at Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in La Crosse. Their daughters, Therese and Christine, are both trying to forge acting/singing careers in Minneapolis/St. Paul. His published choral music can be found on the publisher Hal Leonard’s website or in the online music store, JW Pepper. He has just begun to develop his own website which will feature his compositions and arrangements, both classical and vocal jazz.