

The City of the Soul

for 8 male voices, opus 18

I
II
III
IV

acknowledgement

Permission to set this sonnet sequence to music has been obtained from The Lord Alfred Douglas Literary Estate (Mrs. Sheila Colman).
Awarded First Prize for best Dutch Choral Composition 2001.

composed

between 2nd and 15th August 2000 on a sonnet sequence by Lord Alfred Douglas

dedicated

to Caspar Wintermans, Hans Petri & Jonathan Brown

duration

ca. 9 min.

premièred

on 30th September 2001 at the Parkstad Limburg Theater in Heerlen (The Netherlands) by the vocal ensemble Lagrime

published

by Donemus

scoring

2 Countertenors, 3 Tenors, 3 Basses

THE CITY OF THE SOUL

I

IN the salt terror of a stormy sea
King?
There are high attitudes the mind forgets;
And undesired days are hunting nets
To snare the souls that fly Eternity.
sing.
But we being gods will never bend the knee,
Though sad moons shadow every sun that sets,
And tears of sorrow be like rivulets
To feed the shallows of Humility.

Within my soul are some mean gardens found
Where drooped flowers are, and unsung melodies,
And all companioning of piteous things.
light,
But in the midst is one high terraced ground,
Where level lawns sweep through the stately trees
And the great peacocks walk like painted kings.

III

THE fields of Phantasy are all too wide,
My soul runs through them like an untamed thing.
It leaps the brooks like threads, and skirts the ring
Where fairies danced, and tenderer flowers hide.
The voice of music has become the bride
bright,
Of an imprisoned bird with broken wing.
What shall we do, my soul, to please the King,
We that are free, with ample wings untied?
night.

We cannot wander through the empty fields
Till Beauty like a hunter hurl the lance.
There are no silver snares and springes set,
Nor any meadow where the plain ground yields.
O let us then with ordered utterance,
phrase
Forge the gold chain and twine the silken net.

II

WHAT shall we do, my soul, to please the

Seeing he hath no pleasure in the dance,
And hath condemned the honeyed utterance
Of silver flutes and mouths made round to

Along the wall red roses climb and cling,
And oh! my prince, lift up thy countenance,
For there be thoughts like roses that entrance
More than the languors of soft lute-playing.

Think how the hidden things that poets see
In amber eyes or mornings crystalline,
Hide in their soul their constant quenchless

Till, called by some celestial alchemy,
Out of forgotten depths, they rise and shine
Like buried treasure on Midsummer night. *

IV

EACH new hour's passage is the acolyte
Of inarticulate song and syllable,
And every passing moment is a bell,
To mourn the death of undiscerned delight.
Where is the sun that made the noon-day

And where the midnight moon? O let us tell,
In long carved line and painted parable,
How the white road curves down into the

Only to build one crystal barrier
Against this sea which beats upon our days;
To ransom one lost moment with a rhyme
Of passionate protest or austere demur,
To clutch Life's hair, and thrust one naked

Like a lean knife between the ribs of Time.

Lord Alfred Douglas (*Naples, 1897*)

* According to an old tradition, on Midsummer night buried treasure rises to the surface of the earth and shines.