UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

AMERICAN COMPOSER NANCY HILL COBB: HER STORY, HER MUSIC, AND HER *THRENODY*

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AMERICAN COMPOSER NANCY HILL COBB:
HER STORY, HER MUSIC, AND HER *THRENODY*

A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Abstract

The music of Nancy Hill Cobb has been performed across the United States and around the world for decades, but to date, little has been written about the composer. This document contributes to knowledge in the field of choral music by recording, through first-hand accounts and additional research, the life and work of an important American composer. Interviews with Cobb provided valuable information and insight for this study, including how experiences with gender bias shaped her professional life and impacted her musical contributions. Additional information was gleaned through communication with individuals connected to Cobb, and from news stories, writings of the composer, and other publications.

Cobb's music is discussed, including her compositional influences and characteristics, and an overview of her choral catalogue is provided. *Threnody*, a choral-orchestral work written in response to the traumatic 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, is examined through historical precursors, including the grief journey of survivor Ernestine Hill Clark who became *Threnody*'s librettist. A narrative analysis is provided that may be useful to conductors of the work. Future choral scholars who perform music by Nancy Hill Cobb will have access to the information gathered in this document to inform their study. Ultimately, the document shows the importance of Nancy Hill Cobb's contributions to the choral canon and the significance of her choral-orchestral work *Threnody*.

Arise and see through lightfilled eyes, your broken wings are mended.
Love has healed your silent mind. Arise my soul, sing a new song.

—Ernestine Hill Clark

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Introduction

Early in the year 2000, performers and audience members filled the First Presbyterian Church in Oklahoma City for the world premiere of *Threnody for an April Day*. They had all been affected by the shocking first act of domestic terrorism in the United States, which had occurred in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. Five years later they waited expectantly, gathered under one roof to experience a choral-orchestral work written to honor those who had been affected by the horrific bombing.

Composer Nancy Hill Cobb conducted this first-ever performance of her masterwork. She, too, had been affected by the blast. Her sister Ernestine was a peripheral survivor.

While composing and premiering this, perhaps her greatest piece, Cobb was dealing with a separate struggle of her own. Gender bias in her workplace had come to a head, and Cobb was living with the aftermath of filing a gender pay equity complaint against the university where she had spent nearly her entire professional life. The pain of misogyny permeated the time she spent composing and conducting the first ever performance of *Threnody*, a work born from a different kind of anguish.

This document aims to tell the story of composer Nancy Hill Cobb—her drive to be professionally successful in a gender-biased environment, her shift away from an oppressive religious paradigm, and her influence as a bastion for change, supporting equality for women in the workplace and educating others about the struggle for women's rights. Informed by her story, the document introduces the reader to Cobb's significant compositional catalogue and shows how her work changed as a result of her lived experiences. *Threnody* is placed at the apex of this metamorphosis.

Methodology

To date, little has been written about the composer aside from modest amounts of information published with her music, but her work, and especially *Threnody*, is worth memorializing in the academic realm. This is one of the catalysts for her selection as the subject matter of this document. Due to the lack of published information, communications with the composer have provided valuable information and insight for this study.

Interviews with Cobb were conducted by phone on three occasions using a semi-structured interview protocol. Transcripts of these conversations are included in the appendices to the document along with a letter from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Data obtained in the interviews were analyzed for recurring codes, and follow-up emails were exchanged to gather additional information. Emerging themes were discovered, and these ideas became the threads connecting Cobb's life and work as presented in this document. Member checking was employed when Cobb examined the drafts and final document, and data from supplementary interviews and artifacts were collected to further ensure validity of the findings.

In addition to interviews with the composer, sources used to construct this document include news stories, writings of the composer, online information, books, journal articles, performances of her music, and an in-depth look at her musical scores. Information was also gleaned through communication with additional individuals connected to Cobb and *Threnody*. The aim of these methods has been to produce a genuine representation of the composer, including an accurate telling of her story, especially as it relates to her music and influences on her compositional style.

Scope

The scope of the document falls within boundaries of information that is relevant to the modern choral conductor. The document is not intended to present a complete biography of Nancy Hill Cobb. Instead, biographical information is limited to events as they relate to her compositional development and work, demonstrating how life experiences informed and impacted the composer's musical output. Additionally, the document does not attempt to provide a complete discussion of Cobb's catalogue but does reference representative works along with its focus on the choral-orchestral work *Threnody*.

Because *Threnody* was written to honor those affected by the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, that event is briefly discussed as background for the piece. While this event cannot be thoroughly examined within the scope of this study, basic information about it is necessary to the discussion of *Threnody*'s genesis. Historical information regarding the event is plentiful and has been distilled from newspapers, journals, government publications, and from the Oklahoma City Memorial Museum.

Structure

Chapter 1 of this document contains biographical information about Nancy Hill Cobb, attempting to show who she is and the environments in which she was writing. Chapter 2 is about her music overall, and Chapter 3 discusses *Threnody* specifically. Appended to the document is additional information regarding Nancy Hill Cobb's life and music. This includes her complete catalogue, links to recommended performances of her music, a timeline of her education and work, her choral conducting experience, and lists of her professional awards, honors, and memberships.

The document aims to contribute to knowledge in the field of choral music by documenting, through first-hand accounts and additional research, the life and work of an important American composer. Her compositional catalogue is introduced, and a narrative analysis of the pivotal work *Threnody* is provided. Future choral scholars who choose to perform music by Nancy Hill Cobb will have access to the information gathered in this document to inform their study. Ultimately, the document will show that the music of Nancy Hill Cobb is a vital part of the choral music library, and that *Threnody* is a poignant, unique piece that deserves a permanent place in the choral canon.

Chapter 1: Biographical Information

Early Life and Family

Nancy Elizabeth Hill was born on November 15, 1951, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her parents, Mona Faye Elrod Hill and Ernest O. Hill drove over an hour to get to the Albuquerque hospital. They lived approximately seventy miles from there in Mountainair, where Cobb spent the early years of her life.

Music was part of Nancy's world from the beginning. She grew up in a family of accomplished church musicians who regularly attended the local Baptist church. Jo Addie Elrod, her maternal grandmother, played the piano, and Thomas O. Elrod, her maternal grandfather, taught in singing schools using "The Southern Harmony." This compilation, published by William Walker in the nineteenth century, was similar to the Sacred Harp tradition, using shaped notes to harmonize popular melodies set to sacred texts. Though Thomas died when Nancy was only five years old, his musical influence lived on in her home. Nancy's mother also played the piano, both by ear and by reading from a shaped-note hymnal.

Nancy is the youngest of three sisters. Helen, who is thirteen years older than Nancy, is still living. Ernestine, who passed away in 2013, was eight years older than Nancy. Because both sisters were so much older than Nancy, their relationships with her had a maternal quality. While they did not grow up together, the three sisters maintained positive relationships throughout their adult lives. In fact, Ernestine and Nancy collaborated as adults on one of Nancy's most significant artistic achievements. Ernestine Clark wrote the poetic text of *Threnody*.

Nancy's parents both had careers outside the home, something that was not common for women at the time.

> Back when I was growing up, it was very unusual for women to work full-time outside the home. My mother, I wish I had known enough to say to her before she died, "Wow, you were an amazing woman…" She was more amazing than I ever knew. Other moms didn't work outside the home, but my parents needed the money. That was how they provided for their kids.[1]

Nancy's mother, Mona, was an educator. She taught third grade with classes as large as forty students. Though Mona was not a formally trained musician, she often ended up helping with music classes and accompanying Christmas music programs. Nancy's father, Ernest, was a USDA Soil Conservation agronomist. With parents doing government work at the local and federal levels, the family did not have a lot of extra money. Still, Mona and Ernest made music education a priority by ensuring that all their children learned to play the piano.

Because of the investment their parents made in piano lessons, all three sisters played both piano and organ well enough to accompany church services. The older sisters, Helen and Ernestine, were years ahead of the younger Nancy, and they played for church more often than she did. A favorite family tale is that little Nancy, at only three or four years old, would climb up onto the piano bench and say, "I'm practicing," wanting to be like her big sisters and her music-making family.[2] Nancy began taking piano lessons at the age of six when the family moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. They remained there for three years.

Okmulgee through High School

In 1960, the family relocated to Okmulgee, Oklahoma, about forty miles south of Tulsa. At that time, Nancy was almost nine years old. Life in Okmulgee was full of music at home, at

1. Nancy Hill Cobb, interview by author, October 14, 2024.
2. Robert E. Lee, "Today Milestone In the Career Of Nancy Cobb," *The Oklahoman*, June 24, 1988, https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/1988/06/24/today-milestone-in-the-career-of-nancy-cobb/62647976007.

church, and at school. Nancy remembers a happy adolescent life there that was replete with musical experiences.

Beginning in the fourth grade and lasting all the way through high school, Nancy took piano lessons from Geneva Carr, who had a master's degree in music education from the University of Oklahoma. Nancy remembers her as an excellent piano teacher. Carr was also a public-school teacher whose fourth-grade classes began early in the morning. Nancy's lessons with Carr took place at 7:30 a.m., before the school day started. This unusually early lesson time worked because Nancy, her parents, and Carr were all committed to Nancy's growth as a pianist.

At Okmulgee High School, Nancy played the clarinet under the guidance of band director Floyd Moyer. Moyer was well-known and active in the Oklahoma music education community, eventually becoming the first music specialist for the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association in 1970. Because of his instruction, Nancy was exposed to standard wind ensemble literature, such as "Chester" by William Schuman and "Festive Overture" by Dmitri Shostakovich. She remembers the quality of repertoire she learned during those years, saying, "We played some excellent music in my high school band."[3] Cobb believes that her compositional ear and her contemporary harmonic sense were developed out of these high school experiences playing great wind ensemble literature.

Nancy's first forays into musical composition took place during her high school years. The first thing she remembers writing was a choral piece for her church youth choir. Looking back, she says, "I don't why I did that. I mean, who was I to think that I could write something that somebody might want to do?"[4] She also composed a piano piece that she performed on her

3. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
4. Nancy Hill Cobb, interview by author, December 20, 2024.

high school senior recital. Her first arrangement was an SSA hymn arrangement written for the FBC Okmulgee treble ensemble.

Church music experiences in Okmulgee were a significant and formative part of Nancy's musical life. The Southern Baptist Church's intentional approach to the teaching of choral music fostered quality musical training and produced excellent church choirs.[5] Today, Cobb remembers this to be true, emphasizing that she received an exceptional music education in the Southern Baptist Church. In addition to accompanying the FBC Okmulgee beginner choir, which she began doing in the seventh grade, she also sang with the church's outstanding youth choir under the direction of music minister Guy Lyall. Lyall was a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University, and his musical leadership was a primary influence in Nancy's decision to attend school there.

Nancy participated in the Baptist Youth Choir Festival through her church choir each year, and the experience of this annual choral extravaganza made a lasting impression. Being in the combined choir each year gave Nancy the opportunity to perform with large groups, singing great choral pieces, such as "How Lovely Is They Dwelling Place" from *Ein Deutsches Requiem* by Johannes Brahms. Nancy remembers singing a Joseph W. Clokey setting of Psalm 94 at the festival when she was in the eighth grade. The text of the piece made such an impression on the fourteen-year-old Nancy that she returned to it thirty-one years later when composing her choral-orchestral *Threnody*.

University Studies and Early Professional Life

In 1969, Nancy began her studies at Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), a private liberal arts university in Shawnee, Oklahoma. At the time, she had no specific career goals in

5. Susan Kitts Messer, "The Southern Baptist Children's Choir Curricula From 1941 Through 1985 and Influences of Major Music Education Trends Upon the Curricula" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1988).

mind. Opportunities for women were not abundant, and only 43 percent of women in the U.S. worked outside the home.[6] A high school guidance counselor once suggested that she go into engineering, but Nancy did not even consider it. She had never seen a female engineer. Besides, her area of interest was church music. Unfortunately, Nancy could not dare to dream of becoming a minister of music, because women were not allowed to hold that position in the Southern Baptist Church. Instead, she entered university with a declared major in music education and the idea that she would probably marry a minister of music.

Nancy's time at OBU changed her. For the first time, she saw women who were thriving as professionals in upper academia, teaching music theory and other courses, and composing and arranging music. She became drawn to composition during music theory classes when she realized, "Everybody hated it, and I loved it."[7] A sophomore theory assignment, realizing a figured bass line in the style of Bach, made a particular impression. She did well, and received what she calls "pivotal encouragement" from her theory teacher.[8] Claude (C. L.) Bass encouraged Nancy to develop her talent as a composer, and she eventually made the decision to change her major from music education to music composition. She wrote her parents a letter about this unconventional choice. Nancy discovered that letter again after her mother died. Mona's decision to keep it indicates that she must have known the significance of this bold and life-changing decision.

Under the tutelage of C. L. Bass, who became her first composition teacher, Nancy developed her skills. She remembers Bass and the rest of the OBU faculty as being kind and helpful to her throughout her program. The capstone of her honors project was the composition

6. "Women's Labor Force Participation," Institute for Women's Policy Research, accessed April 6, 2025, https://statusofwomendata.org/earnings-and-the-gender-wage-gap/womens-labor-force-participation.
7. Lee, "Today Milestone."
8. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

of an operetta titled *And On Earth Peace*. She calls it a "little tiny opera" but remembers how supportive the professors were.[9] Faculty members Jim Brown, Don Clark, and Jim Woodward performed as members of the cast. They, and many others, later become colleagues and friends. In 1973, Nancy graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University with a Bachelor of Music, Magna Cum Laude, With Honors.

From OBU, Nancy went on to graduate school at Michigan State University (MSU). East Lansing was a long way from Okmulgee and, in many ways, a whole new world. Baptists did not permeate MSU the way they had permeated her life to this point, but Nancy remembers learning that people are not all that different, even in such differing places: "It was kind of a stretch for a girl like me who grew up in Oklahoma to go off by herself to a northern cold state where there were very few Baptists. I basically remember thinking, 'Well, people are all the same.'"[10]

While Michigan was a whole new world in some ways, in others, it was unfortunately similar to Oklahoma. Being a female composition major was unusual. Nancy was the only one in her class at OBU, and when she went on to graduate school at MSU, she was the only female in the ten-member theory-and-composition cohort there. She remembers the strange actions of an MSU professor who, when the time came to play recordings in class, would not let her drop the needle onto the record, even though the male students always did. Instead of letting Nancy follow suit, the professor would jump up to do it himself each time, telling Nancy, "You shouldn't have to do that." While the intent behind his gesture may have been chivalry, Nancy felt she was being treated as if she were less capable.

Nancy's primary instrument was piano, and at MSU, she found herself in the studio of Ralph Votapek, the gold medalist of the first Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. She

9. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
10. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

remembers, “They put me with Ralph Votapek, bless his heart. He had all piano majors except me. I'm going, ‘Oh you poor guy. You have to deal with me and my piano.’”[11] Being in his studio as the only non-piano major was a bit intimidating.

At MSU, Nancy studied composition with H. Owen Reed, a composer who was especially known for his wind ensemble music. Nancy went to graduate school during a time when composers were generally encouraged to be more avant-garde, and she dabbled in that world for academic purposes. Still, her preference leaned toward tonal sounds and sacred choral music. Her first published composition, a children’s song titled “Come Thou Almighty King,” was released in 1974.

A notable development during this time was the use of erasable ink, a significant innovation for composers when everything was still written by hand. Cobb laughingly remembers, “Back in the dark ages you had to use ink to write your music. The biggest motivation when I was in school was that they had figured out erasable ink on a kind of plastic sheer paper.”[12] It was years yet before copy machines would be able to replicate scores written in pencil. Computers did not become mainstream until the early 1980s, and Finale music notation software was not available until 1988.

After completing her master’s degree at MSU in 1975, Nancy Hill taught for one year at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia where she met her first husband, fellow faculty member Larry Cobb. Mercer is a small liberal arts college with Baptist roots, but Cobb says, “It was not nearly as Baptist as OBU was.”[13] The Mercer environment was more familiar to her than MSU

11. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.
12. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
13. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

had been, but not as conservative as what she had experienced during her time as an undergraduate at OBU.

A year later, in 1976, Cobb returned to Oklahoma Baptist University as an Instructor of Music, teaching mostly theory and composition courses. During her early years as an OBU faculty member, her church music roots were reinforced at church music conferences. The young Cobb regularly attended Church Music Week at Glorieta, a Christian camp located in the Sangre de Cristo mountain range in the foothills of the Southern Rockies. Church Music Week at Ridgecrest, a camp located just outside Asheville, North Carolina, was also significant. Attendees performed an oratorio each week, such as Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, immersing Nancy and the other participants in outstanding choral music. In later years, Nancy's own *Seven Last Words* had its national premiere on June 24, 1988, during Church Music Week at Ridgecrest.[14]

During the 1981-1982 school year, Cobb was up for tenure at OBU. She was also pregnant with her first child, Cary. She remembers being afraid that if anyone found out she was having a baby, it would hurt her chances at the promotion: "I was dead level certain that I didn't want anybody to know I was pregnant until after I got tenure, because I just didn't trust anybody. I was three or four months along before anybody ever knew."[15] Cobb did earn tenure that year, without her pregnancy being discovered, and was promoted to Assistant Professor. She continued to be active in OBU's academic community, serving on committees and mentoring students. Still, Cobb knew she would not be able to promote further without a doctorate, so she decided to return to school.

In 1983, Cobb began doctoral work at the University of Oklahoma (OU) while retaining her faculty position at OBU. She completed courses during the summers and then took one year

14. Lee, "Today Milestone."
15. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

of study leave from OBU in 1984-1985 during which she was paid half her normal salary to take full time coursework at OU. She arranged her courses on Tuesdays and Thursdays and, with a toddler at home, she travelled from Shawnee to Norman to attend classes twice a week.

At OU, Cobb's primary composition teacher was Michael Hennagin. She had also developed a prior professional relationship with theory professor Jim Faulconer through the Oklahoma Music Theory Roundtable.[16] Both of these professors allowed Cobb to tailor her studies toward what she wanted to learn. With Faulconer, she chose a directed reading that was an analysis of the Britten *War Requiem*, because she wanted to learn more about orchestration methods. With Hennagin's guidance, she wrote music in her own style.

During her doctoral work, Cobb also continued to develop her philosophy of teaching. One of her projects during this time was to develop a composition curriculum. She advocated then, and still believes now, that teachers of composition should guide students to write for the musicians around them. She thinks students need to have the opportunity to hear their music performed by actual people and not only by digital renderings. Cobb's own body of work reflects this philosophy as well. She has always written for forces that are available, so that her music can be readily performed.

Cobb's doctoral composition project was *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, a multi-movement work for choir, soloists, and chamber ensemble. She composed the piece over two years, beginning in 1985. She spent the first year writing the music while pregnant with her second child, Allison, and the second year orchestrating it after the young children had gone to bed. The introduction to Cobb's DMA document explains that she chose to write for a sixteen-member chamber orchestra because it incorporated the instrumentation most likely available at

16. "Oklahoma Music Theory Roundtable (OMTR)," United States, 2022, retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0039057.

churches, and that the piece is written with the "above-average church choir" in mind.[17] This piece, along with the majority of her work, shows a composer writing with intention for the forces at hand.

Cobb was named director of OBU's University Chorale in 1985. Under her baton, the Chorale sang the first ever performance of *The Seven Last Words of Christ* for her final composition recital. Cobb completed her doctorate in 1987, and *The Seven Last Words* was published in 1988, becoming her nineteenth composition in print.

Later Professional Life

After earning her doctorate in 1987, Cobb remained on faculty at OBU for fifteen more years. Although no load credit was given to her for writing, these years at OBU were some of her most compositionally productive. She notes that, because of her teaching load, "If I was going to write any music, it had to be in the summer."[18] Still, from 1987 to 2002 she wrote twenty-three pieces, most of them for choir, and almost all of them with sacred texts. The environment she was in supported these ensemble and textual choices, as did her upbringing in church music. Cobb's masterpiece, *Threnody*, was also composed during this fruitful time.

Unfortunately, Cobb's time at OBU was not all positive. Her experiences in Michigan and other places had shown her parts of the world that were more supportive of women's equality than the Southern Baptist environment in which she was immersed at OBU. Perhaps this is why in 1994, when she discovered a significant pay disparity between her and a male colleague of the same tenure, she chose to fight it. This required Cobb to file with the Equal

17. Nancy Hill Cobb, "The Seven Last Words of Christ: A Sacred Cantata for Chorus, Soprano and Tenor Soloists, and Chamber Orchestra" (DMA doc., University of Oklahoma, 1987), 1-2.
18. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

Employment Opportunity Commission, which is the first step in any pay equity dispute. OBU eventually settled with her over pay equity, and the agreement included a non-retaliation clause.[19] The following year, Cobb was further disillusioned when a gay student was outed after a police report detailed an off-campus beating that landed him in the hospital. The university required the student to attend conversion therapy and later expelled him in his senior year.[20] Cobb was a vocal advocate for the student in meeting after meeting with various administrators and remembers of that time, "I was angry with everyone that I went to talk to."[21] While these and other frustrations planted the seeds of separation from OBU, Cobb remained on faculty there for several more years.

This challenging period saw a change in Cobb's compositional text selection. She moved away from composing sacred music for church choirs, instead gravitating to Latin or secular settings that could be used by academic and other ensembles. Cobb began writing *Threnody* in 1996 and completed it in 1997. With some Latin liturgical texts, an excerpt of Psalm 94 in English, and a substantial amount of secular poetry written by her sister, this piece marks the noted textual shift in Cobb's choral work. Before 1997, almost all her compositions had been sacred. After *Threnody*, almost none of them are.

In 1999, under Cobb's direction, the OBU Chorale recorded and released its first CD,[22] an incredibly expensive undertaking at that time. In December of that same year, Cobb conducted the OBU music division's collaborative oratorio project, an honor usually reserved for guest conductors such as Donald Neuen and Tim Stalter. In 2000, she conducted the premiere of

19. Nancy Hill Cobb, email message to author, December 24, 2024; Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
20. "'Could be any boy:' Matthew Shepard's story was almost my story," *The Dallas Voice*, October 30, 2024, https://dallasvoice.com/could-be-any-boy-matthew-shepards-story-was-almost-my-story.
21. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
22. The Oklahoma Baptist University Chorale, conducted by Nancy Cobb, recorded live on campus, 1999, Tempo Recordings, CD.

Threnody at the Southwestern American Choral Directors Association Convention, and in 2001, Cobb took the OBU Chorale on their first performing tour of Italy. Despite these professional successes and intermittent positive experiences, Cobb continued to be discouraged by administrative decisions and the discriminatory environment. In 2002, she resigned from OBU after twenty-six years.

The next chapter of Cobb's professional life took place at Dallas Baptist University (DBU) where she served as the Program Head of Theory and Composition for three years, beginning in 2002. From DBU, she went to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). She was hired there as the Founding Director of the Bower School of Music in 2005. In addition to her work in building the music school, she also directed the FGCU University Choir and Chamber Singers whose concerts included occasional performances of her own music.

Cobb experienced a personal tragedy in 2009 when Steve Lippens, her second husband, died of pancreatic cancer. They had been married for nine years. Her piece for horn and piano, "Opacity and Translucence," is about that experience of loss. Of it she says, "Opacity is a full-out wailing blues."[23]

The remainder of Cobb's career continued to be in administration. Of being an administrator she says, "I had seen what being a less-than-good administrator would do to people. I tried to be somebody who understood the lives of faculty and could think about things from their side."[24] In 2009 she was hired at Indiana State University (ISU) where she was the first female chair of the music department.[25] When, under her leadership, the music department became a School of Music, she was its first female director.

23. Nancy Hill Cobb, email message to author, March 9, 2025.
24. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
25. Meyer, Paula, "Indiana State Names New Music Chair," Indiana State University, July 1, 2009, https://news.indstate.edu/2009/07/01/indiana-state-names-new-music-chair.

In 2013, Cobb began her tenure at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) where she was named Associate Provost for Faculty. She married Terry Trimpe, "one of my biggest supporters," in 2015 while at UNI.[26] In addition to her other accomplishments there, Cobb worked with faculty on the joint Salary Equity Committee in a years-long process that resulted in fifty-one salary adjustments, 70 percent of which were for women.[27] United Faculty President Joe Gorton said the agreement "corrects a substantial inequity that unjustly held down the wages of dozens of faculty members."[28] He credited Cobb's work and called the collaboration "the most important labor-management agreement in the history of UNI."[29] Cobb acknowledges that her prior experiences with gender bias at OBU served to inform her efforts as she spearheaded this important work. Upon completion of the project, the faculty union named Cobb Administrator of the Year. Cobb was granted emeritus when she retired from UNI in 2019.

During her time as a university administrator, Cobb continued to write music for the forces available to her. Because of the instrumental programs at ISU and UNI, she was able to incorporate more instrumental music into her catalogue. 2010's "Opacity and Translucence" was written for ISU horn professor Brian Kilp who premiered it with ISU staff accompanist Martha Krasnican. The multi-movement *Suite for Reeds* was commissioned in 2011 by Trio Canna in Wisconsin and later performed by the UNI reed trio. This performance resulted in UNI faculty member Cayla Bellamy requesting a piece for bassoon that became 2017's "Tumult and Tenacity."

26. Cobb, email, Mar 2025.
27. Jeff Charis-Carlson, "UNI gives raises to 51 faculty to address pay inequity," *Des Moines Register*, August 12, 2016, https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/education/2016/08/12/uni-gives-raises-51-faculty-address-pay-inequity/88611496.
28. "Pay Equity," United Faculty (UNI), August 12, 2016, https://ufaculty.uni.edu/successes/pay-equity.
29. "Pay Equity," United Faculty.

Since retirement, Cobb has continued to compose. In addition to several choral pieces, her post-2019 catalogue includes a work written for mezzo-soprano, trombone, and piano commissioned by Cedar Rapids Opera for online performance during the pandemic. It is appropriately titled "Emma's Misadventures in Zoomland." Cobb's first orchestral commission was written in 2022. Titled *Shades and Illumination*, its successful premiere was followed by selection in the Great Falls Symphony Second Performance Project.

Cobb has few regrets. Hers has been a life well-lived and full, with many professional and artistic achievements. If anything, she notes the degree to which the marketing of her compositions suffered when she transitioned professionally into administration. There simply wasn't time to promote her work the way she wanted to. Still, with a goal of writing at least one piece per year, Cobb produced twenty-two pieces during her fourteen years in university administration. Fifteen of these are choral, three are instrumental, three are for solo voices, and the last of them is a full-scale musical titled *The Suffragist*.

Today, Cobb writes almost exclusively on a commission basis, but she allows for the occasional just-for-fun piece as well. An avid tennis player at age seventy-three, Cobb is currently working on an eight-hand piano piece conceived as a quartet to be performed with three of her tennis-and-piano-playing friends. *Threnody* remains the work of which she is most proud.

Gender Bias and Advocacy

Throughout her career, Cobb shattered glass ceilings and advocated for equal rights for women in the workplace. She believes in the importance of female role models in academia,

because “all you can do when you're growing up is what you see.”[30] Unfortunately, over the course of her career, Cobb found that discrimination against women was not confined to the Baptist world of OBU, but that it was everywhere to some degree. This bias is particularly prevalent in music composition and among music faculty, resulting in inequitable barriers to music publishing and unfair compensation and promotion structures.[31] Cobb’s experiences with misogyny shaped who she became as a female leader and professional, and they certainly affected her artistry and opportunities.

During her first two decades as a composer, Cobb wrote sacred music for the Southern Baptist world in which she was immersed as a member of the First Baptist Church in Shawnee and on the OBU faculty. Nonetheless, getting her work published by Broadman Press and Van Ness Press, the publishing arms of the Southern Baptist Music entity, was made significantly more challenging because she was a woman. She notes,

> As a twenty-five- to forty-year-old woman composer in the Baptist world, the ONLY way I got pieces published was Jim Woodward. Jim was my professor at OBU, and he saw in me something. He was my champion from the time I was in college until he died in 1991 (I was then forty).[32]

Jim Woodward was also responsible for introducing Cobb to Hinshaw Music and Leawood Press. According to Cobb, “The heads of those publishing companies were friends of his…and of course, male.”[33]

In 1997, as Cobb transitioned away from church music, her relationship with a new publisher was also facilitated by a male choral colleague. Robert Ward connected her to Santa Barbara Music Publishing when he commissioned “Cantate Domino” for the Stillwater Boys

30. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
31. Christiane Gilbert, “An Examination of Gender Trends and Sexism Among University Composition Faculty” (DMA diss., Boston University, 2021) vii, 27-36, 187.
32. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024.
33. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024.

Choir. Cobb's piece went on to become an all-time bestseller for Santa Barbara. In fact, the piece is so successful that a new voicing was requested twenty-seven years later.

Cobb acknowledges with gratefulness the OBU faculty members, such as Woodward, who encouraged her and supported her. She was fortunate to have positive relationships that protected her to some degree, but, over time, she came to recognize the Southern Baptist Church's discriminatory policies, and she began to separate herself from it: "For a long time, OBU was extremely important to me. I mean, it's still important. There were great things going on there musically, but there was the point when I thought, 'You just can't treat people that way.'"[34] Today, she finds the continuing misogyny of the Southern Baptist Church to be wholly unacceptable.

> In 2024, part of me wants to forget the Southern Baptist part of my life…You and I both know what they voted on in June 2024: that women cannot be pastors. That was actually a reaffirmation of what has been the Southern Baptist way…What a blow to women of faith in the SBC who would be fantastic pastors. The 25-year-old me would not have realized that.[35]

As a university administrator, Cobb often told the story of her eighteen-year-old self who could not imagine doing anything besides marrying a minister of music. She had never seen a female minister of music, because women were not allowed to hold that position in the Southern Baptist Church. Cobb's career goals developed only when she saw other women doing professional things. Seeing them "formed in my mind a different possibility of what I could do with my life."[36] She used her story on several occasions, including during a Women in Leadership training that she sponsored at UNI, and also during the Implicit Bias Training she

34. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

35. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024; Peter Smith and Holly Meyer, "Southern Baptists narrowly reject formal ban on churches with any women pastors," Associated Press, June 12, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/southern-baptist-churches-women-pastors-34edfd1578e609c3acb187ab90f0255e.

36. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024.

created for search committees there. She used it to show "how important it is that people who go to college can see somebody like them doing something great."[37] She later adds, "and that applies to EVERYONE who is not white and male."[38]

Cobb understands that people need role models similar to themselves, and she herself has unknowingly been that example. One such instance is a songwriting credit on the TV show "Hour of Power." Jim Woodward asked Cobb to write something for the show in 1981, and her piece ran as the opening theme song of the show for two years. In the early 1980s, Rebecca Burkhardt, a graduate music student at the University of North Texas, watched the show with her grandmother. She saw the name Nancy Hill Cobb flash across the screen as the credited composer and remembers thinking, "That's a woman who wrote that!"[39] Burkhardt was surprised and impressed that a female composer had achieved such recognition on a nationally televised program. It was both a sobering and an encouraging realization. Burkhardt's shock brought to light the pervasive and normalized inequality in the world around her, but seeing a woman find success despite ubiquitous gender bias inspired hope of what could be possible. Burkhardt went on to become a successful university professor, orchestral conductor, and composer. Decades after seeing Cobb's name on "Hour of Power," they coincidentally become colleagues at UNI.

Cobb has also been an influence for female equality on people who do not share her gender. Larry E. Schultz graduated from OBU in 1986 and became a minster of music. In his position at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, he celebrates the contributions of women to the church and strives for gender inclusivity in the language of

37. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
38. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024.
39. Rebecca Burkhardt, interview by author, March 16, 2025.

worship. He credits his major professor at OBU, Nancy Cobb, as being one of the strong women who opened his mind to women in ministry and to the Divine Feminine.[40]

Like so many women, Cobb faced the challenges of being a working mother. She experienced firsthand the struggles of raising a family in a patriarchal culture. Women were expected to take care of the household and, as a result, had less time to focus on their careers. She has no regrets though, saying "I love that I have a family!" and adds, "These days I think there's a lot more division of labor. I think it's gotten better."[41]

Cobb's lifelong quest for equality is perhaps why her first creation for the theatre is "a passion project related to the state of how women are viewed in the USA."[42] *The Suffragist* tells the story of the struggle for women's rights in the United States. In Cobb's own words,

> I don't think I would have ever written *The Suffragist* had I not experienced things like the salary equity thing at OBU or some of the things I dealt with at Indiana State as an administrator. I thought that discrimination against women was only in the Baptist world, and I found out it was everywhere. It's worse in the Baptist world, but it was everywhere. Those kinds of things affect you as an artist, and they drive you to make statements in particular ways.[43]

After a three-year writing process, *The Suffragist* premiered in 2021 following significant delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic.[44] Making the show happen, from conception to creation to first performance, was a monumental undertaking that put Cobb's passion, tenacity, and capability on full display. Seeing this firsthand, Rachel Klein, New York City-based director of *The Suffragist*,

40. Jann Aldredge-Clanton, "Changing Church: Rev. Larry E. Schultz, Minister of Music, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, North Carolina," January 7, 2012, https://jannaldredgeclanton.com/changing-church-rev-larry-e-schultz-minister-of-music-pullen-memorial-baptist-church-raleigh-north-carolina.

41. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

42. Cobb, email, Dec 24, 2024.

43. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

44. "Nancy Hill Cobb on The Suffragist Musical," aired May 28, 2021 on *News/Talk* 1540 KXEL, https://soundcloud.com/newstalk1540kxel/nancy-hill-cobb-on-the-suffragist-musical-fri-may-28-2021 (2:28).

aptly summarized Cobb's efforts, saying, "That woman is like the lightning rod of Iowa. There's nothing she can't accomplish."[45]

Creating *The Suffragist* further ignited Cobb's passion to elevate women and see their stories told. For this purpose, she was instrumental in establishing American Women Heroes Onstage, a non-profit that offers grants in support of performances that celebrate women and support female equality. Cobb's professional encounters with institutionalized gender bias were ubiquitous, and yet she persevered to find significant professional success. Perhaps even more importantly, Cobb let the challenges become a mission, amplifying the voices and stories of other women, and affecting tangible progress for those who follow in her footsteps.

45. Isaac Hamlet, "'The Suffragist,' an Iowa-made musical, holds its long-delayed world premiere in Cedar Falls," *Des Moines Register*, July 14, 2021, https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2021/07/14/broadway-scale-musical-made-iowa-premiere-cedar-falls-the-suffragist-nancy-hill-cobb/7622383002.

Chapter 2: The Music of Nancy Hill Cobb

Chapter 1 discussed the life of Nancy Hill Cobb and the various environments in which she lived, worked, and composed. Chapter 2 examines her music, including an overview of her compositional influences, style, and process, as well as the evolution of her work over time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of notable choral pieces and performances, followed by a brief account of how Cobb hopes her music will be used in the future.

Compositional Influences

Church Music

Cobb's earliest musical influences were the church music experiences she had as a child and young adult. She was surrounded by sacred texts and tonal music, both of which became the norm in her own compositions. From an early age, Cobb was exposed to choral music in the church, both as a singer and as a listener, and its SATB sonorities became the primary sound of her compositional life.

The music she heard, sang, and played in the church was used purposefully and in specific settings to bring meaning to listeners and musicians alike. This direct, intentional usefulness became a core objective of Cobb's music as well. She went on to write music intended for specific environments, musicians, or ensembles. This included music for use in sacred services, commissioned pieces, and even a theme song for a religious television show. Composing music to be readily performed has always been of primary importance to Cobb. Her philosophy, championed during her doctoral work, is "Why should I write something for

academic purposes so it can get bound and look pretty and sit on a shelf? That's not music. That's an exercise."[46]

Church music influences are evident in much of Cobb's music. For the second movement of *Threnody*, "O Lord God Unto Whom Vengeance Belongeth," Cobb returns to the Psalm 94 text she first sang as an eighth grader performing during the Baptist Youth Choir Festival. In many other pieces, especially those written during her first two compositional decades, Cobb uses sacred texts and hymn tunes that were first introduced to her as a young person in the church. The early influence of church music is evident in Cobb's work, from text selection to utilitarian writing to evocative choral settings.

High School Band

As a teenager in the Okmulgee band, Cobb encountered what she now considers to be the greatest influence on her harmonic and rhythmic sensibilities: music for concert band. Wind ensemble music with its current instrumentation rose to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, most of the music Cobb encountered as a clarinet player in her high school band was quite modern, utilizing twentieth-century compositional devices and innovative sonorities.

Cobb became accustomed to the interesting sounds of changing meter and rhythmic intensity in pieces like "Festive Overture" by Dmitri Shostakovich. "Chester" by William Schuman further exposed her to the harmonic creativity of modern wind band composers, and she encountered expressive twentieth-century melodic themes in Lucien Cailliet's transcription of "Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral" by Richard Wagner. Pieces such as these are likely where her musical ear became accustomed to modal scales, augmented intervals, polychords, metric

46. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

change, and non-traditional key relationships. These sounds are evident throughout Cobb's compositional output.

Composition Teachers

Claude (C. L.) Bass (b. 1935)

Cobb was influenced by three different composition teachers during her time as a student. First, Claude (C. L.) Bass at Oklahoma Baptist University recognized her talent. Cobb credits Bass with giving her "pivotal encouragement at the age of nineteen,"[47] ultimately leading to her change of major from music education to music theory and composition. Years earlier, Bass himself received this same kind of pivotal encouragement from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's William J. Reynolds. Reynolds encouraged Bass to pursue doctoral studies, and Bass eventually became the first in his family to hold a graduate degree.[48] In a February 2020 interview, Bass spoke of the positive impact of relationships on his personal musical development.[49] It seems Bass applied this same principle to his work with Cobb during his time as an educator at OBU in the 1970s.

Bass's own area of compositional expertise was church music. It is no wonder then that under his tutelage, and at a Baptist university where church music thrived, Cobb refined her compositional skills in the same genre. Her honors project with Bass, *And On Earth Peace*, was an mini-operatic retelling of the story of the last week of Jesus's life.

47. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

48. Matt Sanders, "Retiring prof to push aside the clock while creating music," *Baptist Press*, August 21, 2001, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/retiring-prof-to-push-aside-the-clock-while-creating-music.

49. "An Interview with Dr. Claude L. Bass, Part 1," *CUEcast*, February 4, 2020, https://www.youthcue.org/2020/02/04/episode-12-an-interview-with-dr-claude-l-bass-part-1.

However, church music was not all Cobb composed with Bass. He encouraged her to enter various pieces into different competitions, and at his urging, Cobb once entered a piano sonata into a Music Teachers National Association contest. She received a judge's comment that the composer was clearly influenced by Bartók. Cobb remembers thinking at the time, "I've never even played any Bartók!"[50] and yet her style, even today, contains elements similar to Bartók's contrasting moods, folk influences, and rhythmic drive.

H. Owen Reed (1910-2014)

At Michigan State University, Cobb was in the composition studio of H. Owen Reed. Reed had studied with Howard Hanson at the Eastman School of Music and in additional settings with Arnold Schoenberg, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. Reed was primarily a wind ensemble composer, and his *La Fiesta Mexicana* has become part of the standard concert band repertoire.

La Fiesta Mexicana is a tonal piece, but Reed has experimented with serialism, minimalism, and works that move in and out of tonality.[51] During her time at Michigan State, Cobb also explored some of these avant-garde approaches which were expected of composers at the time. Her master's thesis piece was an orchestral work in which she experimented with box notation. She dealt with atonal compositional systems during her master's studies as well. Cobb found these various avant-garde approaches to be interesting as an academic study, but her preferences have always remained firmly rooted in tonality.

50. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
51. "Interview with Dr. H. Owen Reed," interview by James Syler, *Ballerbach.com*, July 2001, http://www.lilaclane.com/howenreed/interview.html.

Michael Hennagin (1936-1993)

When Cobb returned to school to pursue her doctorate, her primary composition teacher at the University of Oklahoma was Michael Hennagin. He had studied composition with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood and electronic music at Southern Illinois University.[52] Hennagin had also been an orchestrator for film composer Jerry Goldsmith, and his instruction led to valuable educational experiences for Cobb.

Hennagin guided Cobb in her composition studies without micromanaging her output. She remembers with gratefulness than he did not try to force her to write in a particular way, saying, "He let me write what I wanted to and in the style I wanted to write. He didn't try to force me into some avant-garde thing. And ultimately, I think the world of composers have come back from avant-garde, so it was a good thing!"[53] While Hennagin was open to Cobb's compositional style, he was not completely hands-off. His comments and suggestions regarding her work were helpful, and she grew a great deal as a composer during her time at OU.

Cobb wrote *The Seven Last Words of Christ* as her doctoral composition project under the guidance of Michael Hennagin at OU. In the acknowledgements of the accompanying document, Cobb thanks Hennagin for "superior skill in the teaching/guiding process."[54] Today, she remains grateful, reflecting that she learned different things from each of her composition teachers and feels fortunate to have studied with the "right people for the right time."[55]

52. Dianna Everett, "Michael Hennagin," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, January 15, 2010, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=HE014.
53. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.
54. Nancy Hill Cobb, DMA doc., iv.
55. Cobb, interview, Oct 2024.

Jim Woodward and the Oklahoma Baptist University Chorale

As a young professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Cobb encountered a mentor in Jim Woodward, a charismatic and well-known conductor who served as the director of OBU's University Chorale from 1968 to 1985. Cobb would write pieces for the Chorale and then take them to Woodward for feedback. He identified passages that were "inordinately difficult,"[56] and in doing so, he helped her develop a sense of writing with consistency of difficulty throughout each piece.

In 1985, Cobb became the director of the OBU University Chorale. Throughout her tenure, the group continued to be a workshop environment for her. She was able to put her pieces in front of the choir and experience what they sounded like in person. It was also an opportunity to identify challenges that arose and what worked especially well during rehearsal. This process served to reinforce one of Cobb's core beliefs—that it is imperative for composers to write for musicians to whom they have access, because hearing one's music performed by live musicians is invaluable.

The OBU Chorale was a muse for Cobb's compositions. They premiered pieces of hers including "Psalm of Constancy," *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, and "The Milkmaid's Fable." In 1989, she wrote "In the Beginning" for them. In 1999, Cobb's Chorale recorded an album under her baton that included three of her pieces—"Antiphon of Praise," "The Milkmaid's Fable," and "Psalm of Constancy"—in addition to works by Bruckner, Vaughan Williams, Dello Joio, and Rutter.

56. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

Favorite Composers and Works

Cobb's favorite composers include Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith, and Leonard Bernstein. Each of these twentieth-century composers has a unique musical voice. Still, within their highly individualized styles, there are characteristics in the music of each composer that can also be found in the work of Nancy Hill Cobb.

Béla Bartók is known for his complex rhythmic structures and asymmetrical meters. Cobb also employs asymmetrical meters, syncopation, and other rhythmic devices to create interest, especially in her instrumental music. The piano quartet she is currently writing is a prime example of rhythmic drive and complexity, traits which are evident throughout her catalogue. Harmonically, Bartók uses quartal harmony and cluster chords, both of which are prevalent in Cobb's work. In the "Prologue" of *The Seven Last Words*, she uses quartal sonorities that are supported by melodic themes using intervals of a fourth. Cluster chords are evident throughout much of her music and are a feature of *Threnody*'s "Ubi Caritas." In the same way that Bartók's music is a fusion of folk music, classicism, and modernism, Cobb's work, especially pre-1997, is a fusion of hymn tunes and modern sonorities with respect given to some compositional devices of the common practice period.

The music of Paul Hindemith, like that of Nancy Cobb, is tonal but non-diatonic. Hindemith uses consonance and dissonance to create tension and resolution, and Cobb does this as well, in *Threnody* and throughout her catalogue. Twentieth-century counterpoint is a characteristic element of Hindemith's work. Cobb also uses counterpoint with modern sonorities. Examples of this can be found in the fugal writing of the first movement of *The Seven Last Words*, throughout the two-part "Cantate Domino," and in many other pieces. Utilitarian writing is a feature of both Hindemith and Cobb. Believing that music should be accessible to audiences

and "for people who want to sing and play for their own enjoyment," Hindemith wrote *Gebrauchsmusick*, which was composed for a specific and identifiable purpose.[57] A constant feature of Cobb's compositional life has been the intent to write music that can readily be performed. She often writes for certain musicians or specific situations, and she tailors the difficulty level of her music to achieve accessibility.

Leonard Bernstein composed music that blends high and low styles. Cobb's work also showcases this fusion, with writing that is accessible to the intended performer while maintaining her elevated style that employs modern devices and sounds. Bernstein is known for his musicals, and recently, Cobb has added a musical to her body of work with 2019's *The Suffragist*. Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* is one of Cobb's favorite choral works. It employs irregular meters, modal melodies, and text painting, all of which are features of Cobb's music as well.

As a choral composer, Cobb has been influenced by many of the pieces she has conducted with various choirs. In addition to Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, her favorite choral works include *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Ralph Vaughn Williams, *Gloria* by John Rutter, and *Ein Deutsches Requiem* by Johannes Brahms. From form and structure to harmonization, tonality, and orchestration, similarities can be found between each of these pieces and Cobb's choral output.

Another composer whose work has influenced Cobb's writing is Benjamin Britten. In the early 1980s, under the tutelage of theory professor Jim Faulconer at OU, Cobb studied the orchestration of Britten's *War Requiem*. Before studying the work, she did not generally have instruments double notes the choir was already singing. Time spent with Britten's choral-orchestral work changed Cobb's mind about this. Today, she believes the purpose of

57. Paul Hindemith, *Frau Musik* (B. Schott Söhne, 1957), preface.

orchestration is not to help singers, although it can, but rather to add color, as Britten showcases to remarkable effect in *War Requiem*. Likewise, Cobb's use of orchestration as another layer of text enhancement is evident throughout *Threnody*. In addition to orchestral writing, another way in which Britten's *War Requiem* influenced Cobb's creation of *Threnody* is text compilation. Both works use a juxtaposition of traditional Latin texts with poetry written for their time.

Compositional Style and Characteristics

Cobb's music is a fusion of her personal experiences, her compositional influences, and her own musical sensibilities. Her music is accessible and yet highly artistic, with pieces that encompass a wide range of difficulty levels according to the intended performers. Still, Cobb's music is all stylistically connected. Its tonal, harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic characteristics combine to create a sound that is uniquely hers.

Tonality

Cobb's music almost always has a tonal center. During her master's degree, she dabbled in atonality as part of the curriculum, but when writing without academic requirements, she has always gravitated to tonal music. In addition to this being her personal preference, she believes that today's audiences respond more positively to tonal music.

Cobb uses a variety of tonalities, including major, minor, and modal, to convey the text. Diversity of tonalities was also a feature of Cobb's teaching. As a professor, it was important to her that students develop aural skills outside of the major realm. In 1998, she wrote an article for the *Choral Journal* titled "It's A Major Key World," arguing for the inclusion of multiple tonalities in choral warm-ups. In the article, she suggests that "choral conductors can increase the

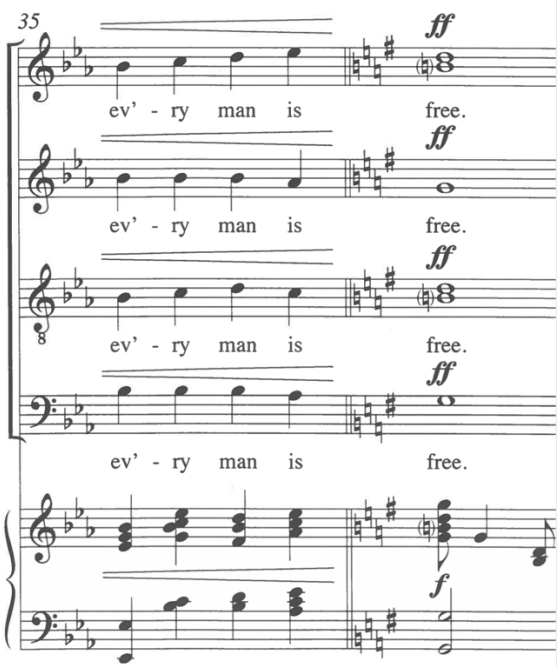
musicianship of all singers by routinely including vocalization patterns not only in minor but also in modal, whole tone, and other less frequently used scales."[58]

Breaking away from major key tonalities was a function of her teaching and is a defining characteristic of her music as well. When writing in a major sonority, Cobb often avoids the leading tone, or, if it is present, she lowers it, creating a Mixolydian modal sound. Minor keys are also prevalent in Cobb's work, along with the occasional use of Dorian and Lydian modes.
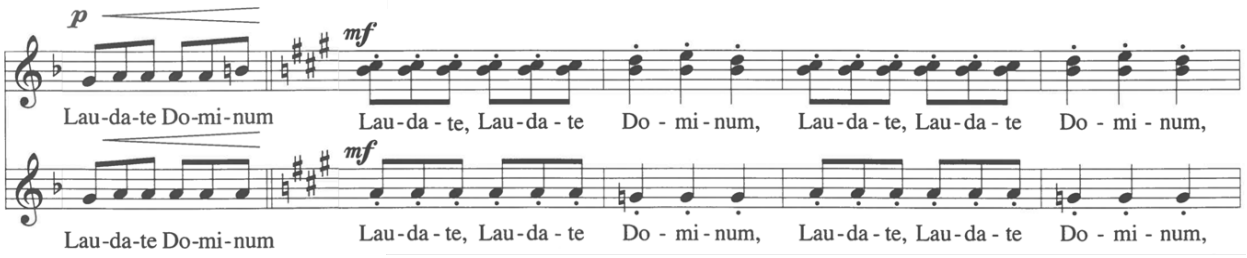
Another feature of Cobb's music is non-traditional key relationships. In her own words, "I don't like traditional key relationships, so there's no way my music stays in some key that everybody likes."[59] She tends toward third-related key changes, such as the shift from E-flat major to G major in "I Dream A World," the interplay between F major and A major in "Laudate Dominum," and the change from E minor to G-flat major in "Sea Fever." According to Cobb, these non-traditional key relationships are "something that I just hear."[60] She has been using them for decades. In her 1987 DMA document she wrote about this characteristic of her work, describing her "prominent use of third relationships in contrast to common practice harmony where there would be a series of tonic/dominant relationships."[61] Cobb's characteristic third-related keys can be seen in the following examples (Ex. 2.1-2.3).

58. Nancy Cobb, "It's a Major-Key World," *The Choral Journal* 38, no. 10 (1998): 31–32.
59. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.
60. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.
61. Nancy Hill Cobb, DMA doc., 38.

Example 2.1. “I Dream a World,” mm. 35-36.[62]
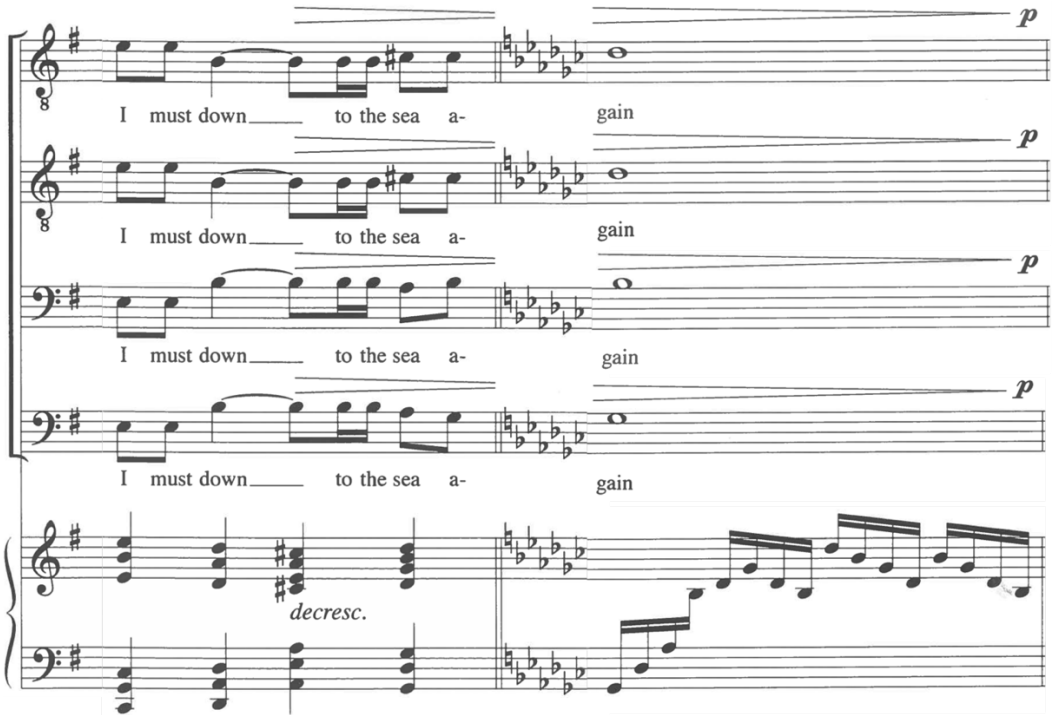


Example 2.2. “Laudate Dominum,” mm. 19-23.[63]



62. Nancy Hill Cobb, *I Dream a World* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2024).
63. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Laudate Dominum* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2001).

Example 2.3. “Sea Fever,” mm. 26-27.[64]



Across these third-related key changes, as in all aspects of her writing, Cobb takes great care with voice leading, encouraging accessibility for singers. Linear voice leading across tonality shifts is evident in the previous examples.
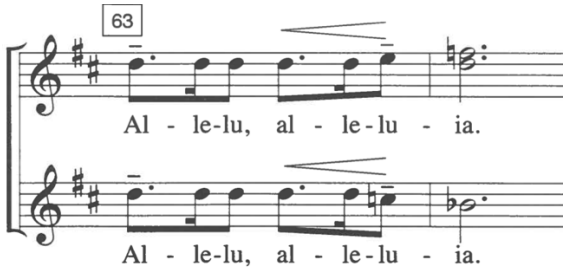
Harmony

Cobb’s harmony is a fusion of twentieth-century sounds, hymn-like choral sonorities, and creative modal writing. It can have a comfortable folk-music-like quality while at the same time being fresh and decisively modern. Cobb generates harmonic variety in her pieces using added tones, occasional polychords, and creative interplay between dissonance and consonance. Cobb’s music often employs quartal harmonies in addition to tertian triads and seventh chords.

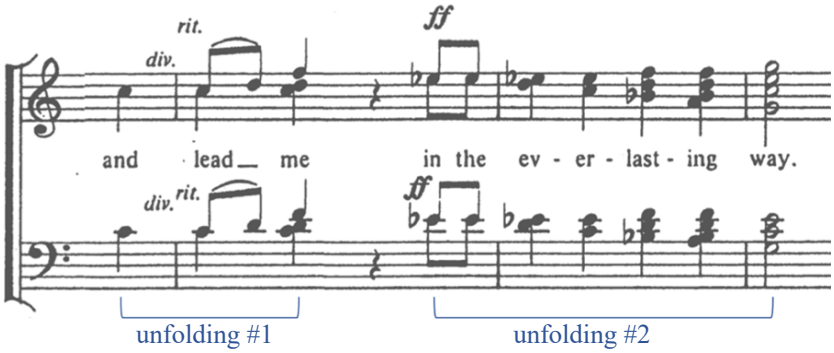
64. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Sea Fever* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2007).

A recurring feature in Cobb's harmonic language is an *unfolding* gesture. This is operationally defined by the author as a compositional device that begins with unison voices on a single pitch. Then one or more voices move away from that pitch by stepwise motion while others maintain the initial pitch, or multiple voices may move away from the initial pitch by contrary stepwise motion. Either way, the unfolding gesture creates a blossoming effect and builds excitement for the listener. Tension is also created and released as the harmonic intervals move between consonance and dissonance. The following examples show this unfolding gesture as seen in several works (Ex. 2.4-2.6).

Example 2.4. "Cantate Domino," mm. 63-64.[65]
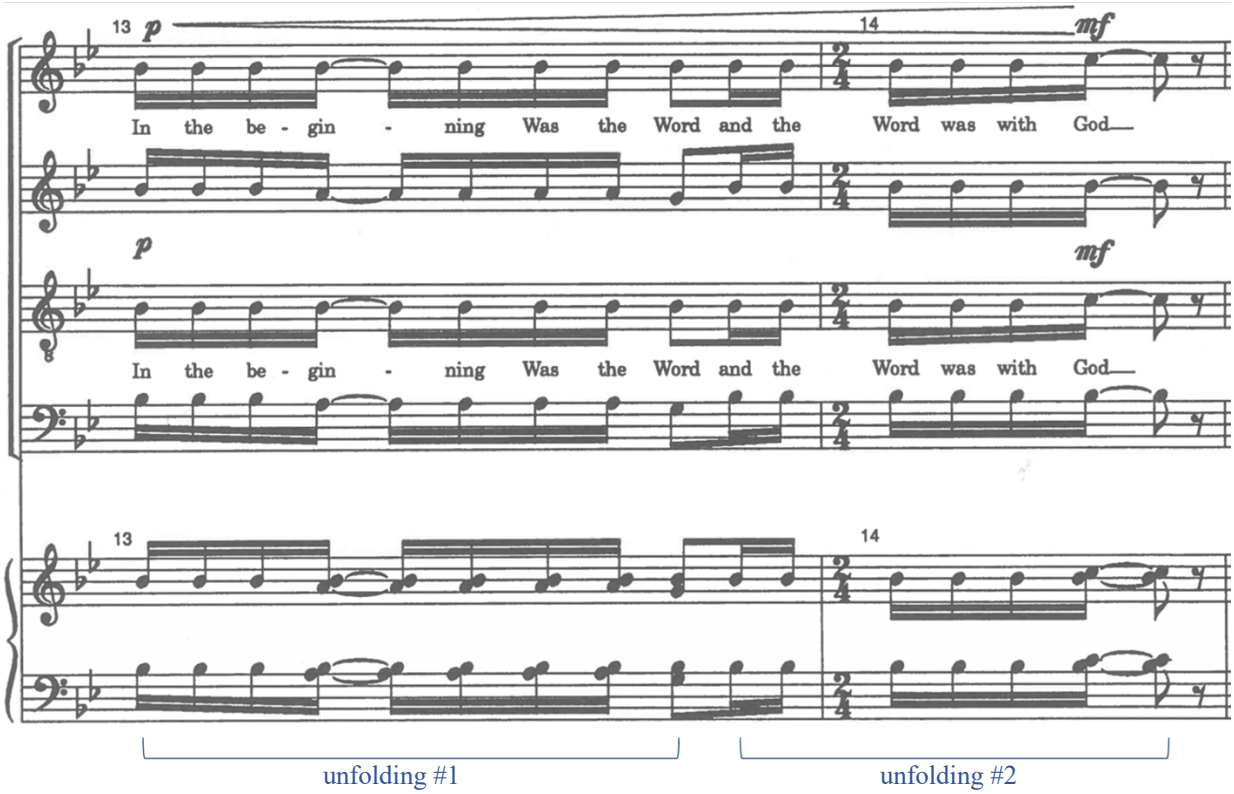


Example 2.5. "Psalm of Constancy," mm. 90-92.[66]



65. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Cantate Domino* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 1999).
66. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Psalm of Constancy* (Hinshaw Music Co., Inc, 1984).
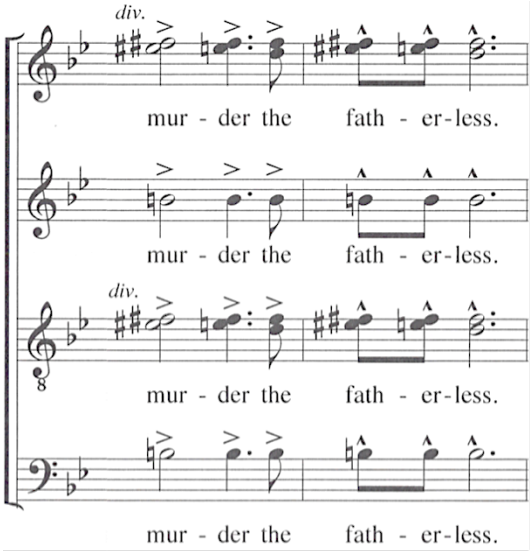
Example 2.6. “In the Beginning,” mm. 13-14 (shown with piano reduction).[67]



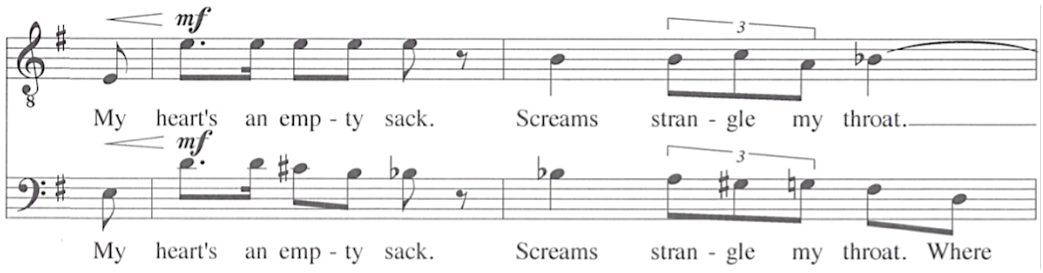
Dissonant structures are used in Cobb’s music to varying degrees according to the level of accessibility for which the piece is intended. In her choral music, harmonic dissonance between voices is often used as a text-painting device, adding tension to intense textual moments. Instances of this from *Threnody* are shown in Examples 2.7 and 2.8.

67. Nancy Hill Cobb, *In the Beginning* (Leawood Music Press, 1990).

Example 2.7. *Threnody*, mvt. II, mm. 70-71.[68]



Example 2.8. *Threnody*, mvt. III, mm. 17-18.[69]
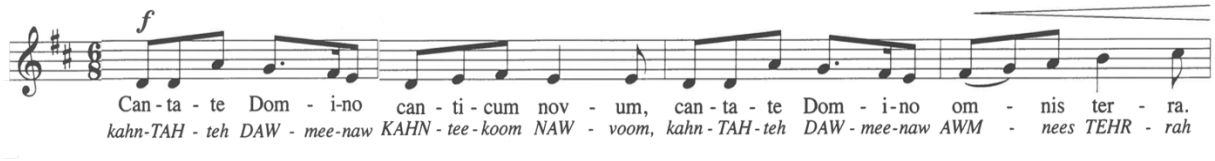


In Cobb's music, harmony is often created using her unique brand of modern counterpoint. Sometimes this occurs when a melody is restated with an added countermelody, as in "Cantate Domino" (Ex. 2.9) and in the second movement of *Threnody* (Ex. 2.10).
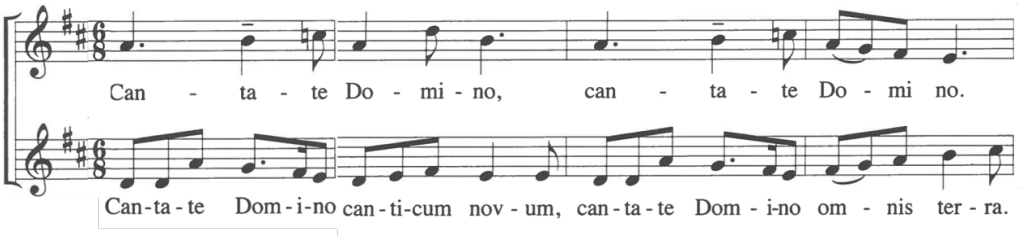
68. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Threnody* (Hinshaw Music, 2004).
69. Cobb, *Threnody*.

Example 2.9. “Cantate Domino,” mm. 1-4 and mm. 14-17.[70]

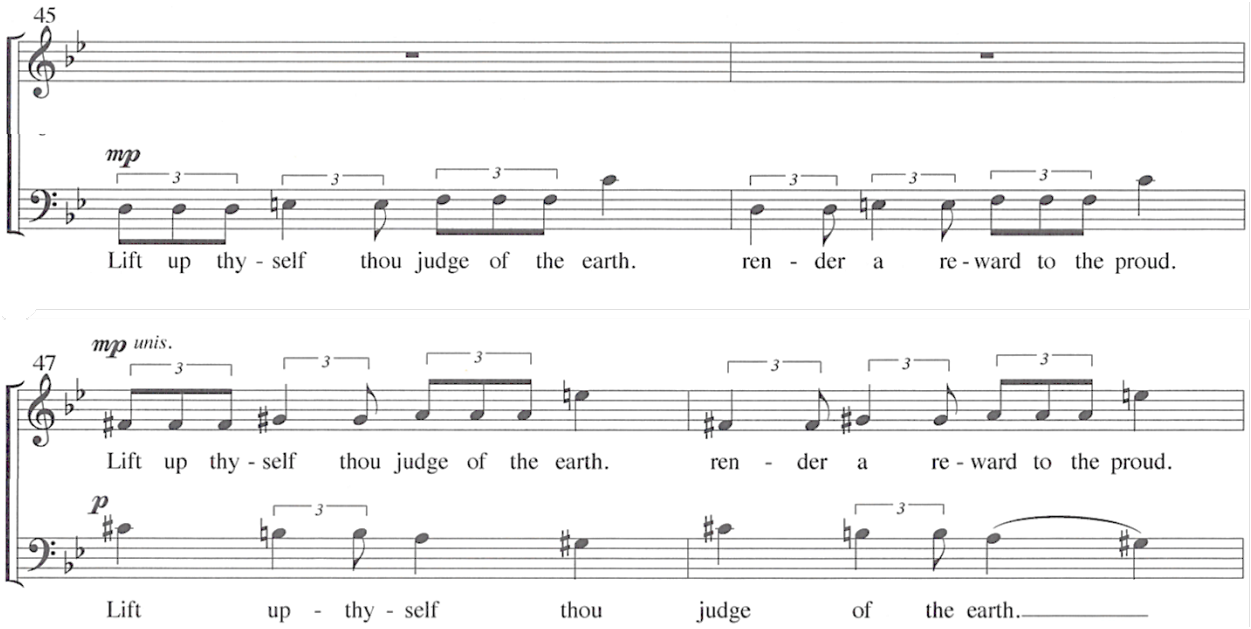
mm. 4-7



mm. 14-17
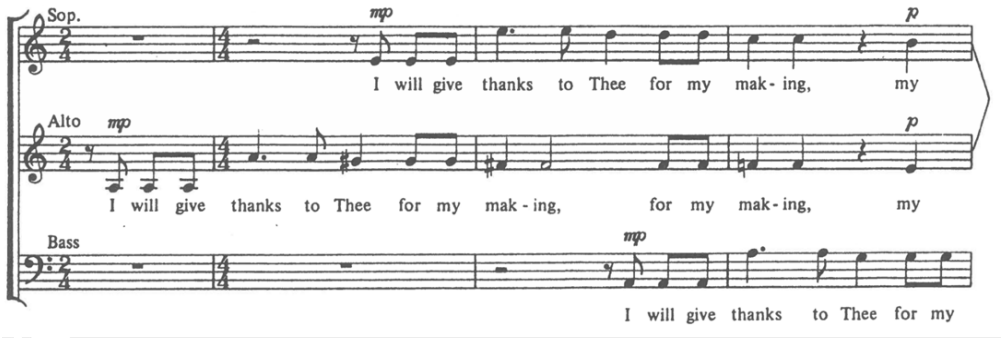


Example 2.10. *Threnody*, mvt. II, mm. 45-48.[71]

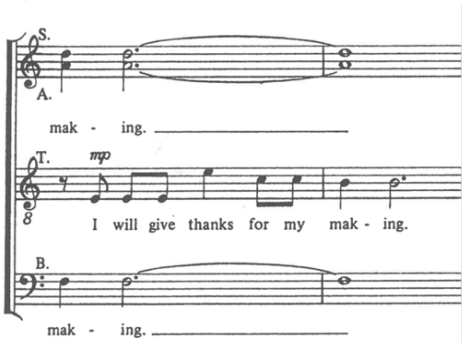


70. Cobb, *Cantate Domino*.
71. Cobb, *Threnody*.
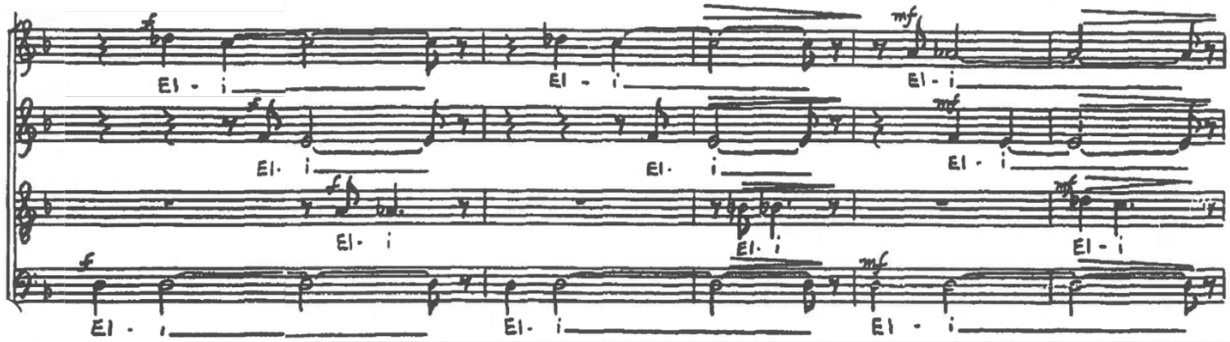
On other occasions, Cobb's contrapuntal writing is a thick texture of several independent voices. Examples of this are found in "Psalm of Constancy" (Ex. 2.11), *The Seven Last Words* (Ex. 2.12), and "In the Beginning" (Ex. 2.13).

Example 2.11. "Psalm of Constancy," mm. 58-63.[72]
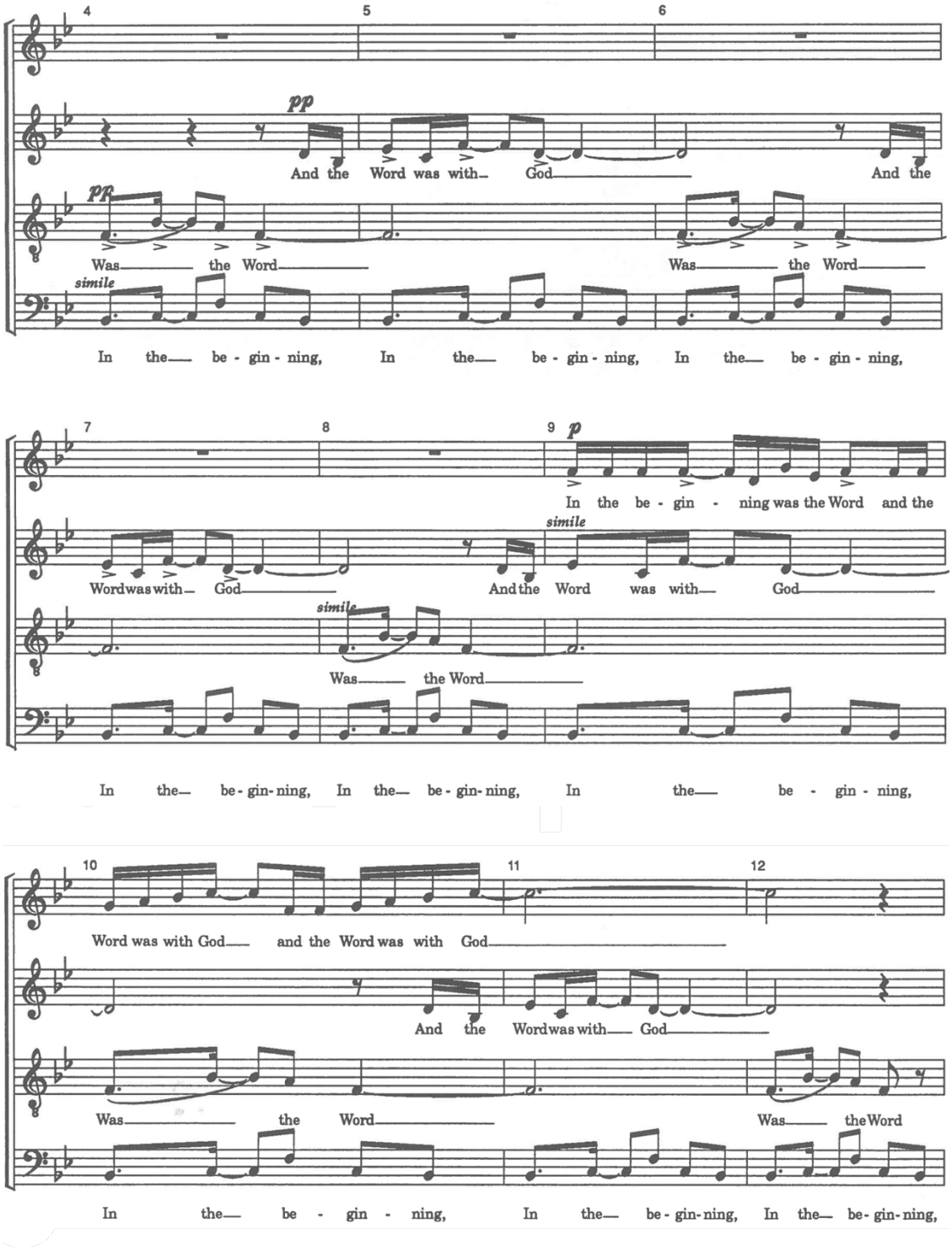




Example 2.12. "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani" from *The Seven Last Words*, mm. 59-63.[73]



72. Cobb, *Psalm of Constancy*.
73. Nancy Hill Cobb, DMA doc., 84-85.

Example 2.13. “In the Beginning,” mm. 4-12.[74]



74. Cobb, *In the Beginning*.

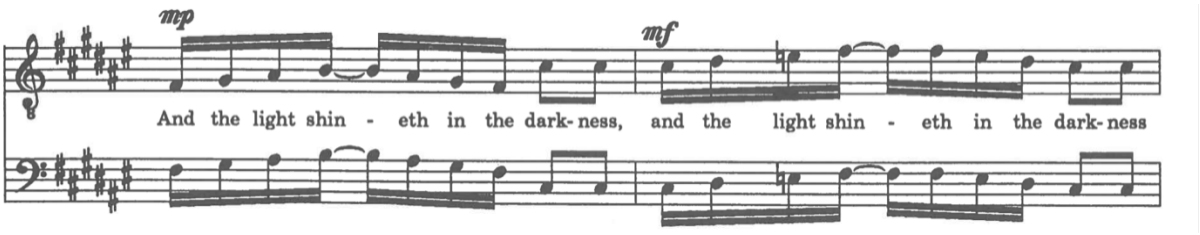
Cobb's harmonic writing, like all aspects of her style, prioritizes textual understanding. During especially important phrases, Cobb often removes harmony altogether, creating unison or unaccompanied moments in order to clarify the text.

Melody

Cobb's choral music features melodic lines that are singable for performers and evocative for listeners. She prioritizes text setting for intelligibility, ensuring that word emphasis is supported by the rise and fall of the melodic line. Pitch range is also taken into account, and vocal lines generally stay within accepted tessituras for each part.
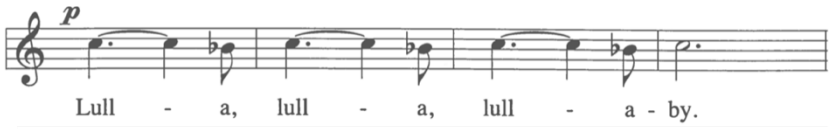
One of the most significant features of Cobb's music is the absence of a leading tone, and this is especially prevalent in her melodic writing. She tends to use a Mixolydian scale, which features a lowered seventh scale degree. The following examples are just a few of the many melodies in Cobb's music that feature a lowered seventh (Ex. 2.14-2.16).

Example 2.14. "In the Beginning," mm. 59-60.[75]
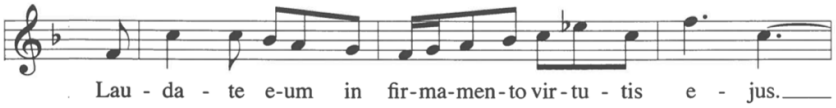


75. Cobb, *In the Beginning*.

Example 2.15. “Titania’s Lullaby,” mm. 48-51.[76]



Example 2.16. “Laudate Dominum,” mm. 13-15.[77]
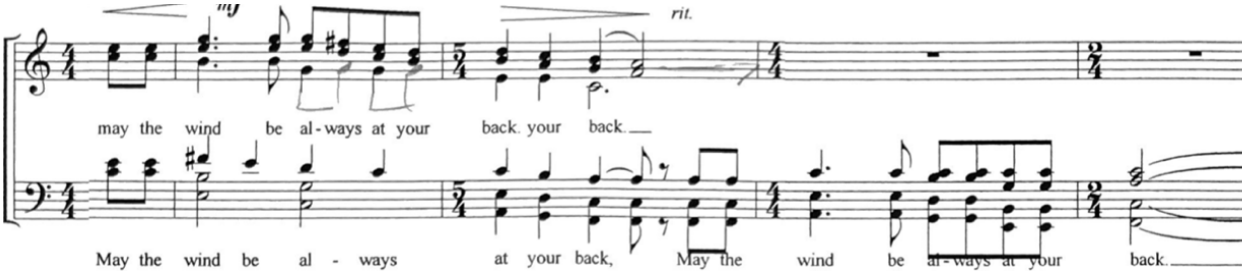


Cobb treats each vocal line as its own melody and uses voice leading principles to ensure that each part is manageable for the singers. While Cobb does not hesitate to break conventional rules of composition, her voice leading is always carefully considered. Of this practice she says,

> [When] writing in the twentieth century-style, of course you're going to have parallel fifths, but there's a lot to be said for all of that discipline of common practice voice leading, because it has to do with musicians being able to do it. There’s a lot to be learned from common practice voice leading. So, you find a lot of parallel fifths in my music, but I’m still keeping all those voice leading principles in there.[78]

An example of parallel fifths with linear voice leading can be seen in Example 2.17.

Example 2.17. “Blessing,” mm. 3-6.[79]
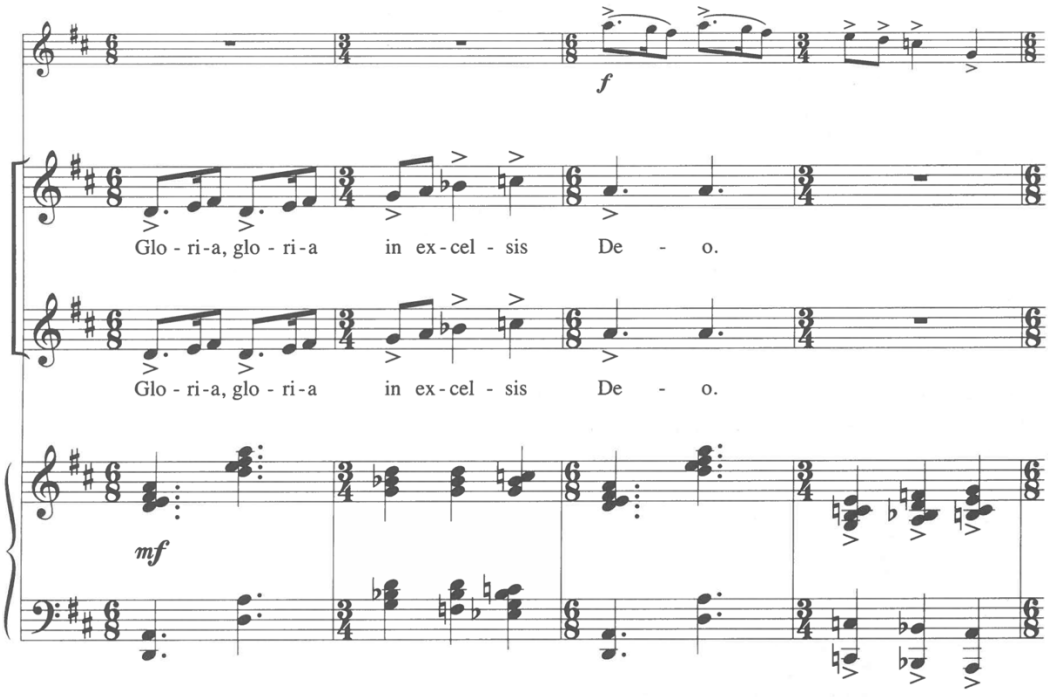


76. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Titania’s Lullaby* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2010).
77. Cobb, *Laudate Dominum*.
78. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.
79. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Blessing*. Score, 2004, photocopy in possession of the author.

Melodic voice leading is such a strong feature of Cobb's music, that it, rather than vertical alignment, often drives harmonic change. Multiple examples of this can be seen in *Threnody* and are discussed in Chapter 3.

Rhythm

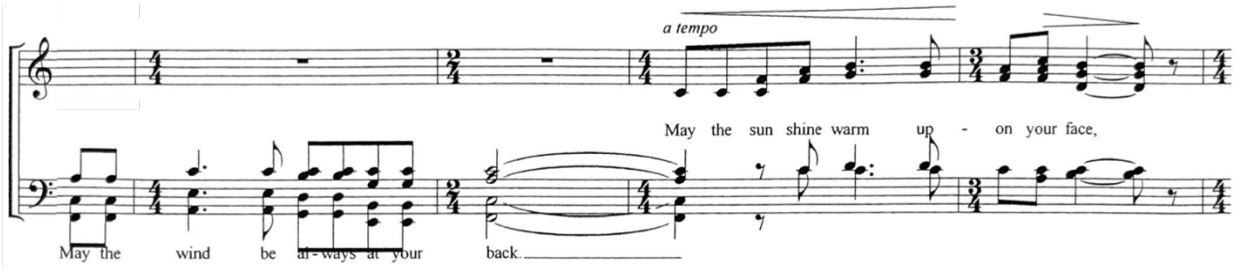
Rhythmic change is a significant part of Cobb's compositional style. This includes changing meters as seen in Examples 2.18 and 2.19.

Example 2.18. "Gloria," mm. 13-16.[80]



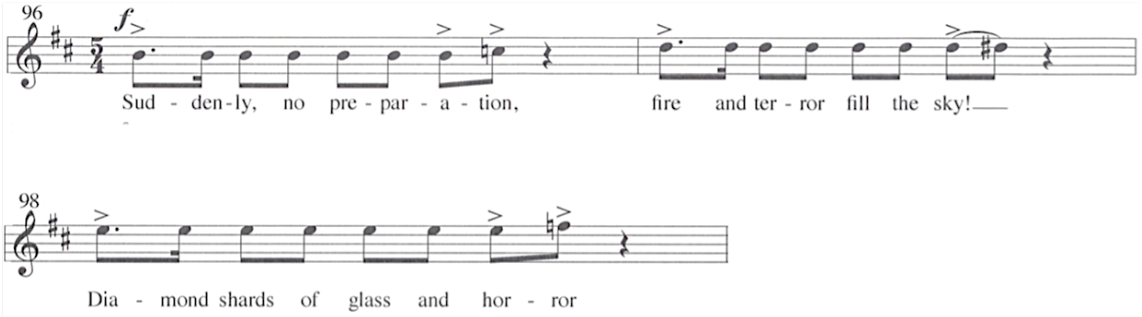
80. Nancy Hill Cobb, *Gloria* (Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2004).

Example 2.19. “Blessing,” mm. 5-8.[81]



Asymmetrical meters are also a feature of Cobb’s music. In her choral music, these choices are often driven by text. Example 2.20 shows text setting in an asymmetrical meter.

Example 2.20. *Threnody*, mvt. II, mm. 96-98.[82]
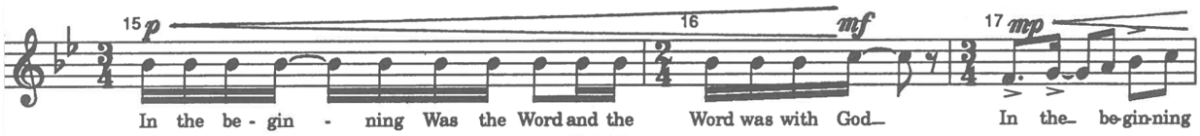


As seen in the previous examples, changing and asymmetrical meters are found in Cobb’s vocal writing. However, these devices often appear with the highest degree of complexity during instrumental-only introductions and interludes. Changing and asymmetrical meters are even more frequent in her instrumental works.

Intricate rhythms are also a characteristic of Cobb’s writing. They, too, are most prevalent in her instrumental music and piano accompaniments. Rhythmic intricacy is employed in her
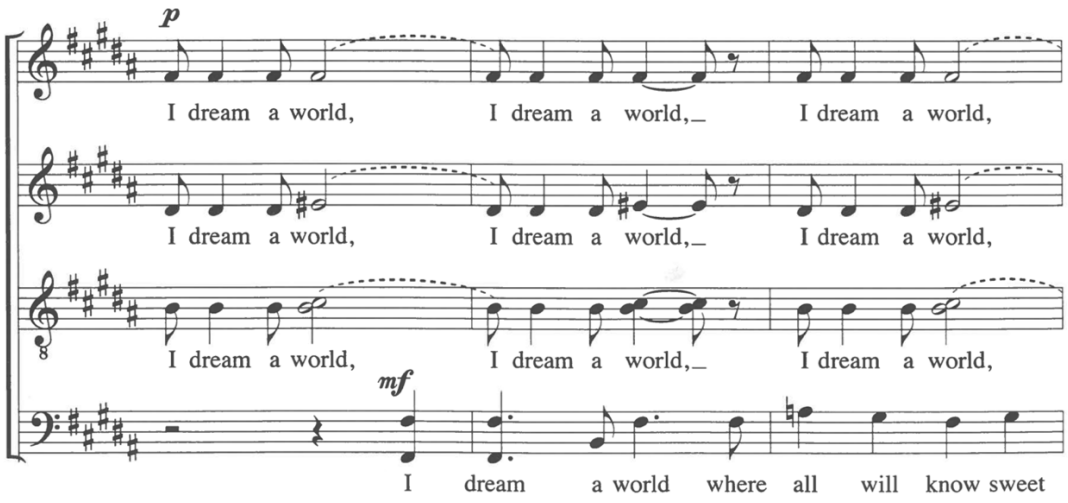
81. Cobb, *Blessing*.
82. Cobb, *Threnody*.

vocal writing according to the intended degree of difficulty. The following examples show driving rhythms, syncopation, repeated rhythmic figures, and alternating triple-duple beat division, all of which appear in her choral work (Ex. 2.21-2.24).

Example 2.21. "In the Beginning," mm. 15-17.[83]

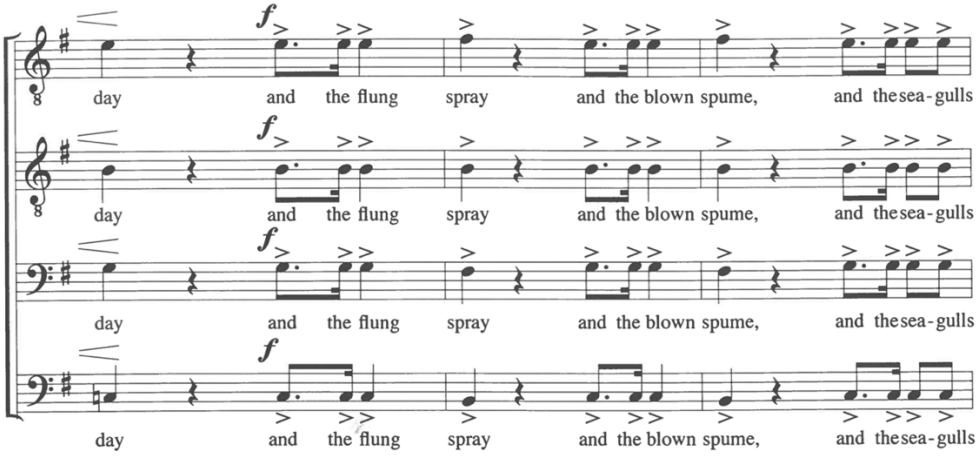


Example 2.22. "I Dream a World," mm. 21-23.[84]
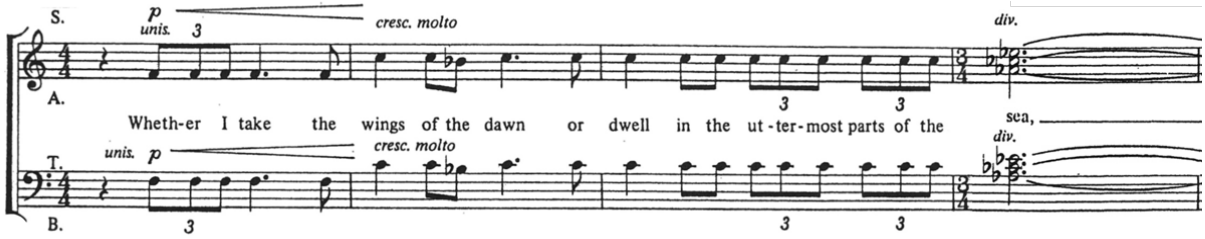


83. Cobb, *In the Beginning*.
84. Cobb, *I Dream a World*.

Example 2.23. “Sea Fever,” mm. 39-41.[85]



Example 2.24. “Psalm of Constancy,” mm. 43-46.[86]



As a choral composer, Cobb believes that “the text is the master.”[87] To this end, her rhythmic choices consistently enhance and support the text. Rhythms are written to mirror textual emphasis by putting syllabic accents on strong beats or giving them longer duration. In moments where intelligibility is paramount, Cobb aligns rhythms across the choir for clarity. Cobb’s rhythmic writing, like her other compositional elements, serves to enrich the text and promote understanding. Enhanced by expressive dynamic change, her writing engages the listener and supports her ultimate goal of creating music that people want to sing and hear.

85. Cobb, *Sea Fever*.
86. Cobb, *Psalm of Constancy*.
87. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

Compositional Process

Text Selection

When writing choral music, Cobb begins with text selection. Generally, she chooses texts that are in the public domain to avoid the process of getting permission. Additionally, texts under copyright can take up to half of the royalties from any given piece of music. Presently, Cobb's text choices are often driven by commission requests, but she remembers searching through books of poetry during her early compositional life. She would read anthologies with work by multiple writers, searching for a poem with meaning that spoke to her and a rhythmic feel that seemed musical. This is how she selected the text for *A Wordsworth Trilogy*, a three-piece choral setting of Wordsworth poems that she composed during her doctoral work.

In addition to poetry, Cobb has taken many of her texts from scripture. The majority of her earlier pieces, including parts of *Threnody*, are set to sacred texts. These are almost always the King James Version of the Bible, both because it is in the public domain and because she finds the King James to be the most poetic of all the translations.

Key Selection

In choosing the tonality for a piece, Cobb considers factors such as the forces for which she is writing and the mood she wants to convey. She notes the ranges of the instrument(s) or voice(s) being used and selects a tonal center accordingly. For instance, D major is a good key for singers, because the octave tonic can be sung by all voices. Additionally, the upper dominant, the A5, is not too high for sopranos. In general, Cobb tries "to be friendly to conductors and

choirs and accompanists" in the keys she chooses.[88] She considers range, tessitura, and difficulty as she writes each piece.

Another consideration regarding tonality selection is the desire to convey a particular mood or color. Cobb experiences synesthesia in her association of certain keys with specific colors. To her, D major sounds "yellow" and bright. Perhaps this is why the final movement of *Threnody*, with its celebratory, hopeful text, is set in D major. "Cantate Domino," at the other end of the difficulty spectrum, also begins and ends in a bright D major. To her ear, keys with flat tonic pitches seem darker, even when the tonality is major. One example of this is the middle section of "Sea Fever" which is in G-flat major, positioned between an E-minor opening and closing.

Cobb uses minor tonalities regularly as well, depending on the text and mood she wants to convey. Modes are also present in her work. Given Cobb's penchant for the lowered seventh, the majority of her modal writing is Mixolydian, but Lydian and Dorian tonalities can also be found.

Writing Process

As the writing process for choral music begins, Cobb starts with text. She first types out the words with plenty of space between the lines and in the margins, allowing for her to doodle ideas around it. She begins without meter in mind and instead speaks the text aloud, taking care to place word emphases where they naturally belong. From this, she chooses a meter that fits the text and then makes adjustments as needed.

88. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

As music is written, the text continues to drive everything. While working through text setting, Cobb considers the mood the words convey. This helps to determine tonality selection. Additionally, she begins thinking about what the accompaniment should sound like. She wants accompaniments to set the mood and complement the text. One example of this is the piano part that accompanies "Sea Fever." At times rollicking and boisterous, and at times watery and lilting, at every turn the accompaniment enhances the poetic longing for the sea.

Cobb considers places in the selected text that naturally call for differentiation or separation. She then musically reflects these shifts, often using metric or tonal changes. If the piece is strophic, the breaks are naturally between stanzas. Since it is not Cobb's style to write strophic music, she finds other ways to delineate stanzas and create musical change. As she hears and writes these changes in meter and/or key, she asks herself, "What's a good surprise and what's a bad surprise?"[89] She wants the musical changes to enhance, rather than detract from, the listeners' understanding of the text.

The listeners' experience is paramount for Cobb. When she was twenty-two or twenty-three, an experience with a cross-disciplinary artistic collaboration had a lasting effect on her. As a student at Michigan State, she was asked to write music that would underpin a reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T.S. Eliot, while choreographed dance also interpreted the poem. She attended the performance where the difficult poem was set to her rather complex music, all combined with an interpretation through dance. She realized that it was simply too much for an observer to take in simultaneously. Since then, she has written music with her audience in mind, taking care to ensure the listener does not have to process complex melodies,

89. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

harmonies, and rhythms all at once. Instead, she focuses on one complexity at a time, using the music to guide the listeners' attention to the appropriate area.

Cobb also considers the musicians' experience. Throughout the process of writing choral music, Cobb tests the voice parts and checks that voice leading works. She wants each part to be filled with singable, musical lines, making them vocally accessible to singers and enjoyable for them to perform.

Cobb does not write for academic purposes or to highlight musical devices or methods. Throughout the compositional process, Cobb keeps her goals in mind: to write choral music that enhances the text, to use piano accompaniments or orchestration to further set the mood, to create sounds that are accessible to the listener, and to achieve consistency of difficulty through the piece. Her intention is to create useful music that will be meaningful to performers and listeners alike.

Compositional Evolution

Cobb's writing has evolved over time in several ways. As she moved away from exclusively church music, she also moved away from predominantly sacred texts. This shift coincided with her personal departure from the Southern Baptist Church, and with the decline of church choirs in general. She began to write choral music for academic institutions and other non-church choirs. Beginning in 1997, the texts for her choral pieces are either secular or Latin. *Threnody*, with a mixture of Latin, secular, and Psalm texts, is the centerpiece of this notable shift.

A driving force of Cobb's writing is utility. She has always written for what is available to her. Since for most of her professional life the ensembles at her disposal were choirs, the bulk

of Cobb's compositional output is choral. When she eventually held positions at schools with thriving instrumental programs, she began to incorporate more instrumental music in her compositions. Today, her catalogue includes music for piano, handbells, organ, symphonic band, orchestra, various instrumental chamber groupings, and musical theatre.[90]

Another compositional development is the level of difficulty in Cobb's music. Over time, more accessible pieces were written. This was in part due to specific commissions, such as her two-part "Titania's Lullaby" written for the Horizon Middle School Treble Chorus in Phoenix, Arizona. Perhaps it was also simply an effort to create music that could be sung by a wider variety of ensembles. Even as she wrote more accessible pieces, Cobb continued to write advanced music as well, showcasing her ability, honed during the early compositional years, to tailor difficulty level to the needs at hand, and to write artistically at any level.

Cobb notes that writing easier music is sometimes more difficult than composing virtuosic pieces. Unsurprisingly, she welcomes the challenge and faces it head on, as is her pattern. Cobb's work continues to be driven by commissions, artistry, and the practical needs of those requesting her music.

Notable Choral Works

Cobb's choral music uses a variety of forces, from two-part to eight-part voicings, with both accompanied and unaccompanied options. Accompaniments range from piano to organ, and some include additional instrumental parts such as a flute obbligato or brass ensemble. Cobb has also written orchestrated choral works for both chamber orchestra and full orchestra. The

90. A complete list of works can be found in Appendix A.

compositions presented in this section provide examples of these various categories. Each piece has been selected because of its representative nature as well as its popularity. The discussion of each work includes a brief introduction to the piece, Cobb's compositional characteristics found within it, information about its premiere or other interesting facts, and a summary of works in Cobb's catalogue that utilize similar forces. The pieces are discussed in chronological order.

Psalm of Constancy (1981)

"Psalm of Constancy," for SATB divisi choir with organ and brass, was written in 1981 and published by Hinshaw Music. A prime example of Cobb's early sacred writing, the text is adapted from Psalm 139. It is both majestic and reflective, with brass, organ, and unaccompanied moments enhancing the text to great effect. Just over four minutes in length, the piece packs a significant amount of musical variety into a relatively short amount of time. A composer's note indicates that in the absence of brass, those parts may be adapted by organ.

The piece showcases many of Cobb's compositional characteristics. It includes third-related key emphasis, beginning in C major before changing to E major, then moving quickly through several other tonal ideas before eventually settling back in C major. Flat sevenths are abundant, and Cobb's characteristic unfolding gesture sees the piece blossom into the final "amen" series. The piece is largely homophonic but includes a few measures of unaccompanied fugal writing. Changing meter and syncopation, especially in the instrumental introduction and interludes, add rhythmic drive and build excitement.

"Psalm of Constancy" was written for the inauguration of Oklahoma Baptist University's thirteenth president and premiered by Jim Woodward and the Oklahoma Baptist University

Chorale. In 1999, it was recorded by the reunion chorale under Cobb's baton.[91] The piece remains a favorite of OBU Chorale alumni even today.

Cobb wrote two other works for organ and brass in that same year: "Gloria In Excelsis Deo" and "Rejoice in This Day," which was sung by the Crystal Cathedral Choir as the introduction for Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" television show. Most of Cobb's organ-accompanied choral works were written during the pre-1997 years when she was still writing almost exclusively sacred music for the church. "Easter Antiphon" (1992) and "Antiphon of Praise" (1993) are choral works from this period that are accompanied by organ alone. Other works for choir with organ and brass include "Be Strong in the Lord," written in 1990, and the much later "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," written in 2012.

The Seven Last Words (1985-86)

The Seven Last Words, a multi-movement work for chorus with soloists and chamber orchestra, was composed over two years in 1985-86 and published by Leawood Press in 1988. It was conceived as a new setting of the traditional last words spoken by Jesus on the cross. Each of the final utterances is set in a single movement, and these are bookended by a "Prologue" and an "Epilogue" that poignantly incorporate the Old Testament prophecy found in Isaiah 9, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," juxtaposed with "Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," from John's gospel in the New Testament.[92] The tenor and soprano soloists are used to great effect, especially in the movements titled "Simon of Cyrene" and "She is Your Mother, He Is Your Son." *The Seven Last Words* is ideal for use during the

91. Oklahoma Baptist University Chorale, "Psalm of Constancy" by Nancy Hill Cobb, conducted by Nancy Hill Cobb, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mz_Nhsln1ic.

92. Isaiah 9:6; John 1:29

Easter season, and, accordingly, the final movement ends with a triumphant "He is not here. He is risen. Alleluia."[93]

In creating *The Seven Last Words*, Cobb characteristically wrote with the performers and audience is mind. The work is intentionally crafted to be accessible to musically informed choirs and congregations, and the instrumental parts are limited in quantity, range, and difficulty, making it performable by a wide variety of groups. Cobb wrote her first version of *The Seven Last Words of Christ* as a doctoral project during her time at the University of Oklahoma, and in the accompanying document she states,

> The melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic language is of an early twentieth-century tonal style using only mild dissonance and non-complex rhythms," and, "this style makes the work performable by [an above average church] choir and also accessible to the average listener in a congregation.[94]

Cobb's setting of *The Seven Last Words* was suggested by her long-time mentor and friend Jim Woodward after the two of them heard a performance of Theodore DuBois's *Seven Last Words of Christ*. Woodward turned to Nancy and said, "Somebody needs to do a new one."[95] So, Woodward compiled the text, and Cobb wrote the music. *The Seven Last Words* was premiered at Oklahoma Baptist University by the University Chorale and conducted by Cobb herself. At that performance, Don Blackley, minister of music at First Baptist Church in Norman, was so impressed with the piece that he recommended it to Baptist national headquarters in Nashville Tennessee.[96] This led to the national premiere of *The Seven Last Words* at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly, a place where Cobb had spent many formative summers. She conducted the national premiere there during Church Music Week in June of 1988. Coincidentally,

93. Nancy Hill Cobb, *The Seven Last Words* (Leawood Music Press, 1988).
94. Nancy Hill Cobb, DMA doc., 1-2.
95. Lee, "Today Milestone."
96. Lee, "Today Milestone."

Jim Woodward was at Ridgecrest during that same week to conduct William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*.

The Seven Last Words is Cobb's first piece for chorus and chamber orchestra. The second was completed in 2008. *Christmas Eve at Sea* was written for the Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers who sang the premiere under the baton of artistic director Nancy Hill Cobb.

In the Beginning (1989)

The SSAATTBB "In the Beginning" is unaccompanied except for a driving sandblock part. It is rhythmic, exciting, uplifting, and catchy, almost guaranteeing that listeners will walk away humming the various melodic themes. Published by Leawood Music Press, the piece has made an appearance at contests, all-state festivals, and regional choral conferences. It is challenging enough to keep singers engaged, and entertaining and enjoyable enough to leave audiences wanting more.

"In the Beginning" highlights Cobb's use of rhythmic complexity, modern counterpoint, and extreme dynamic variation to bring the text to life. It is pleasantly tonal, but still incorporates Cobb's characteristically surprising key changes, from B-flat major to D major to F-sharp major. The piece ends with a return to B-flat major, and flat seventh scale degrees appear, especially in the last fourteen bars. Interplay of dissonance and consonance enhances the text, and Cobb's characteristic unfolding gesture appears several times.

"In the Beginning" was premiered by the Oklahoma Baptist University Chorale, and, though they premiered and performed many of her works, it is the only piece Cobb dedicated specifically to them. Exciting and inventive, the work is a favorite of the composer. In 2011, the University of Southern Mississippi's Southern Chorale sang "In the Beginning" inside the Saint

Louis Cathedral in New Orleans.[97] This performance, conducted by OBU Chorale alumnus Greg Fuller, garners high praise from the composer. Cobb calls it "exactly how I thought of that piece."[98]

"In the Beginning" was a precursor to several other advanced SSAATTBB pieces. "Laudate Dominum" was written in 2000 for the Sine Nomine Choral Society of Shawnee, Oklahoma, of which Cobb was the founding artistic director. "O Clap Your Hands" and "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" followed in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Three more eight-part pieces followed between 2012 and 2014: "When Music Sounds," "Sing We Now of Christmas," and "Tread Softly On My Dreams." Published in 2024, "I Dream a World" is a timely setting of the Langston Hughes poem of the same name. These eight-part choral pieces, most of which are a cappella, surely represent some of the most intricate, challenging, and rewarding works in Cobb's choral catalogue.

Threnody (1996-97)

The centerpiece of Cobb's catalogue, *Threnody*, is discussed in Chapter 3 of this document. It stands alone in her catalogue as the only work for chorus and full orchestra. It was published by Hinshaw in 2004 and remains a highlight of Cobb's compositional life.

Cantate Domino (1997)

Cobb's first choral piece after *Threnody*, this accessible two-part work marks the notable shift in Cobb's catalogue away from church music texts and toward Latin texts that can be used

97. The Southern Chorale, "In the Beginning" by Nancy Hill Cobb, conducted by Gregory Fuller, Saint Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, LA, Spring 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X91uH7_6Qw.

98. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

in academic and secular settings. With a simplicity of form that is appropriate for the level, "Cantate Domino" begins with a unison statement of the singable nine-bar melody. That melody is then restated by Part 2 while Part 1 introduces a countermelody above it. The next section is marked by a key change and new musical material. The final section brings a return of the original material followed by a rousing finish. The 6/8 meter is lilting and delightful, allowing the Latin text to flow easily.

This piece showcases Cobb's modern counterpoint. With lowered seventh scale degrees throughout and a tonality that shifts between D major and F major, this piece has the characteristic Cobb sound without being inordinately difficult. Rhythmic shifts are present but natural, and the unfolding gesture found in much of Cobb's music appears in this song as well, lending excitement to the final repeat of "alleluia" while gently guiding singers into the only three-part chord of the piece.

This two-part work is accessible to choirs of all ages, and yet it is compositionally interesting and musically intellectual. Perhaps this is why "Cantate Domino" is Cobb's best-selling piece to date and was once among the top five all-time best sellers for Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Inc. It has been performed in the United States by groups including the Notre Dame Magnificat Choir at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at the University of Notre Dame, and the Prelude Division of the Young People's Chorus of New York City at Kaufmann Concert Hall.[99] Internationally, it has been heard at St. Suitbertus Church in Wuppertal-Elberfeld,

99. Notre Dame Magnificat Choir, "Cantate Domino" by Nancy Hill Cobb, conducted by Patrick Kronner, Basilica of the Sacred Heart, University of Notre Dame, May 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GZWbNgLcEY; Prelude Division of the Young People's Chorus of New York City, "Cantate Domino" by Nancy Hill Cobb, conducted by Sophia Miller, Kaufmann Concert Hall, New York City, June 7, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgHpjtgKChs.

Germany and in the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Ljubljana, Slovenia.[100] Due to the popularity of the two-part "Cantate Domino," Santa Barbara recently asked Cobb to create a four-part version as well. The new SATB voicing was released in the fall of 2024.

Cobb is adept at composing inventively while keeping each piece accessible to the intended audience. Multiple sacred two-part pieces preceded "Cantate Domino," and two additional two-part pieces have been released since. "Raise A Song" was published by the Choristers Guild in 2005, and "Titania's Lullaby" was published by Santa Barbara in 2010.

Gloria (2004)

One example of Cobb's writing for treble choir is her triumphant "Gloria." Harmonically rich and rhythmically exciting, this piece alternates between two and three parts, keeping the difficulty level reasonable for a medium-level treble chorus. Its soaring flute part adds additional color while showcasing Cobb's solo instrumental writing.

Cobb's rhythmic shifts are shown to full effect in "Gloria" with interplay between duple and triple divisions creating alternating metric emphasis. Her characteristic flat seventh scale degree makes regular appearances in the melody, occasionally preceded in this piece by a flat sixth as well. The dynamic range is wide with changes that are extreme, adding color to the vibrant Latin text.

"Gloria" was written for the OBU Children's Choir and premiered at Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2005 as part of the National ACDA Convention. It was conducted there by Darla Eshelman, a former colleague of Cobb's at OBU who says, "It's a great piece, and to get to sing

100. Schedrik Choir, "Cantate Domino" by Nancy Hill Cobb, St. Suitbertus Church, Wuppertal-Elberfeld, December 16, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWU-K-1quWE; Interludio Choir from Kryoneri, "Cantate Domino" by Nancy Hill Cobb, conducted by Bessy Noti, Cathedral of St. Nicholas, Ljubljana, Slovenia, October 18, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uuxpz8A13Dg.

it in a wonderful venue was amazing!"[101] Since then, "Gloria" has been performed from Denmark to New Zealand and throughout the United States.[102]

Immediately following "Gloria," Cobb wrote two more pieces for treble choir. The SSAA "Magnificat" and the SSA "Jubilate Deo" were both published by Santa Barbara in 2006. Earlier treble works include "Hodie" (2002) and "A Cradle Song" (1987).

Sea Fever (2006)

"Sea Fever" is an evocative example of Cobb's skill in writing for tenor-bass choral sonorities. The piece uses rich four-part harmonic language to enhance the well-loved Salt-Water Ballad of English Poet Laureate John Masefield. Its rolling piano part is particularly descriptive, painting a musical picture of the rollicking sea. This exciting and unique piece is exceptionally engaging for singers and audience alike.

Musical variety in "Sea Fever" is achieved through Cobb's characteristic driving rhythms, metric variations, and tonality shifts. Third-related key changes are incorporated while Cobb's thoughtfully considered voice leading makes the modulations accessible and interesting rather than prohibitively difficult. Text painting occurs throughout "Sea Fever," as voices and piano work together to paint a picture of the poet's intense love and longing for the sea.

"Sea Fever" is the first of several commissions written by Cobb for the Ohio State Men's Glee Club whose director wanted to increase the amount of new music available for tenor-bass choirs. It is notable that music for tenor-bass chorus does not appear in the first twenty-five years

101. Darla Eshelman, text message to author, February 27, 2025.

102. "Gloria," Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Inc., accessed March 8, 2025, https://sbmp.com/SR2.php?CatalogNumber=578; Queen Margaret Chorale, "Gloria" by Nancy Hill Cobb, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG1zFgsC0wg; Webster University Aurelia Choir, "Gloria" by Nancy Hill Cobb, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vi1c1I2x0vs.

of Cobb's compositional catalogue, likely because the ensembles to which she had access were mostly mixed choirs with occasional treble writing opportunities. However, tenor-bass choral writing has proven to be a genre in which Cobb's compositional style especially shines. In the years since "Sea Fever," Cobb has produced five more pieces for tenor-bass choir, all of which were written for university groups. The most recent of these include 2023's "The Dawn's Awake," commissioned by Ohio State, and "Evening," written for the University of Northern Iowa Varsity Men's Glee Club in 2024.

Summary of Choral Catalogue

This selection of pieces is by no means exhaustive. A complete list of works can be found in Appendix A. Cobb's catalogue includes fifty-six choral pieces with more on the way. With a considerable amount of variety in terms of voicing, difficulty, and text selection, there are multiple Cobb pieces for every taste and any ensemble. For decades, Cobb's choral music has been performed at adjudicated contests, for all-state and all-region events, as part of ACDA programs, and by school, university, community, and professional choirs across the United States and around the world. Without question, the music of Nancy Hill Cobb is deserving of a permanent place in the choral canon.

Hopes for Future Use

When Cobb is asked how she would like to see her music used in the future, she responds first with a focus on the experience of those who will sing and play it, saying, "I want the performers to enjoy performing it and to be challenged, and I want the words to mean something

to them."[103] Cobb goes on to say that she hopes her text setting will support understanding and intelligibility. It is important to Cobb that the listener be able to understand the words and relate to what they are hearing. She wants the music, written to enhance and support the text, to speak to people as well as the words do. It is clear that Cobb's intention for her music, which is certainly compositionally interesting and artistically advanced, is not as much academic as it is functional. Her goal is the creation of inventive, expressive music to which people can connect.

103. Cobb, interview, Dec 2024.

Chapter 3: *Threnody*

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the life experiences of composer Nancy Hill Cobb, noting how those experiences shaped her music and her professional life. Chapter 2 discussed her music and provided information about her musical influences, compositional style, and representative choral works. The focus of Chapter 3 is Cobb's choral-orchestral work *Threnody*.

The chapter is structured in five parts. First, historical precursors to *Threnody* are discussed. These include the Oklahoma City bombing and the story of poet Ernestine Clark. The next section presents the genesis of *Threnody*, using information gathered from interviews with the composer and writings of the librettist. A narrative analysis acquaints readers with the work itself, and finally, the premiere and responses to the first performance are shared.

The Oklahoma City Bombing

At 9:02 a.m. on April 19, 1995, an act of violence in Oklahoma City changed the nation forever. A deadly bomb was detonated outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, in the heart of downtown OKC. Many people initially assumed that the horrific explosion was caused by a foreign entity, but the shocking truth was quickly revealed: a disillusioned American had committed this atrocity against his fellow citizens. Before that day, Americans felt secure in their cities, assured that any threats would be from abroad and could be faced together. Now, they realized that enemies also came from within. According to a publication by the United States Justice Department, the bombing "changed the community's and the Nation's general sense of

safety and security.[104] The FBI called the attack "the worst act of homegrown terrorism in the nation's history."[105]

One hundred sixty-eight people were killed by the bombing, some of them children. Eight hundred fifty-three people were injured.[106] The explosion rocked downtown Oklahoma City, demolishing the north third of the Murrah building and damaging three hundred twenty-four of the surrounding buildings. The blast registered 6.0 on the Richter scale and was felt for fifty-five miles.[107]

As damaging as the initial explosion was, the total human cost was far greater. The ongoing emotional and psychological suffering of survivors, family members, rescue workers, and many others, was profound. According to an article in the *Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association,*

> Of the adults in the Oklahoma City MSA [Metropolitan Statistical Area], 61.5 percent reported experiencing at least one direct result of the bombing. In population terms, about 433 thousand adults were exposed to one or more of the consequences of the bombing. Oklahomans…reported more stress, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress-disorder components, and intrusive thoughts related to the bombing than in the control area. The differences persisted into 1996, more than a year after the bombing.[108]

The hundreds of thousands of people affected by the horrific event found various ways to process their trauma. Some made music, some created art, and some wrote poetry and prose.[109] One such person penned the words that became the text of *Threnody*.

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104. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, "Bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building," In *Responding to Terrorism Victims: Oklahoma City and Beyond*, Oct 2000.

105. "Oklahoma City Bombing," US Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed March 20, 2025, https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/oklahoma-city-bombing.

106. Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, *Report on Project Heartland* (May 31, 1998).

107. US Department of Justice, "Bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building."

108. D. W. Smith, E.H. Christiansen, R. Vincent, & N.E. Hann, "Population Effects of the Bombing of Oklahoma City," *Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association* 92, no. 4 (1999): 193-198.

109. "Murals that Heal, in 1995 and Today," Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum, accessed March 20, 2025, https://memorialmuseum.com/events/murals-that-heal-in-1995-and-today.

Ernestine Clark and “Through a Glass Darkly”

Ernestine Clark was a peripheral survivor of the Oklahoma City bombing. She was sitting at her desk in the downtown Oklahoma City library when the bomb exploded. Clark had just turned away from the window when it shattered inward, blowing her across the room and covering her with shards of glass. Clark’s last-minute move away from the window saved her from serious physical injury, but the crystalline splinters she continued to find in her hair for days following the blast were an evidentiary reminder of just how close she had come. Sustaining minor cuts of her own, Clark assisted a badly injured coworker to a downtown triage area.[110]

Once outside, Clark joined with others to try and make sense of what had occurred. It was then that she, along with emergency rescue workers and other victims, became aware of the possibility of a second bomb. Policemen and firefighters shouted at Clark to run for her life. Of that terrifying encounter she recalled, "I was in shock, but I didn't know it at the time. For a year, I had nightmares every night about trying to run away and not being able to."[111] While the fear of a second bomb proved to be unfounded, the panic it triggered compounded the already substantial emotional damage.

Another horror intensifying the relentless post-attack suffering for Clark was the plight of the children. Twenty-one kids were attending daycare on the second floor of the Murrah Building when the bomb went off.[112] Clark was haunted by the knowledge that if the explosion had happened just twenty-eight minutes later, they would have been safe. She was the Director of

110. Rick Rogers, “A musical healing Sisters’ choral/orchestral collaboration meant to express universality of grief,” *The Oklahoman*, March 12, 2000, https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2000/03/12/a-musical-healing-sisters-choralorchestral-collaboration-meant-to-express-universality-of-grief/62207308007.

111. Rogers, “A musical healing.”

112. NPR Staff, “Anniversary of Oklahoma City Bombing Reopens Wounds for Survivors,” *Morning Edition*, April 17, 2015.

Development for the Metropolitan Library System of Oklahoma County, and at 9:30 a.m. on April 19, the kids were scheduled to be at her downtown library branch for story time. Instead, fifteen children in the daycare were lost to the blast while others sustained severe injuries. The anguish of this knowledge was perhaps the most painful thing for Clark to endure, among the many lingering traumas of that horrific day.

For weeks afterward, Clark could not talk about her experiences. Eventually, a counselor expressed concern that if she did not find a way to communicate about what she had endured, she would risk post-traumatic stress disorder.[113] Clark's response to this advice was to begin journaling. She wrote over one hundred pages about her experiences of that day and about her winding journey along the never-ending road of grief. It was these pages that she distilled into "Through a Glass Darkly," the poetry that became the text of *Threnody*. In the notes to the musical score Clark says,

> I was running headlong into walls of pain, seemingly unable to help myself, despite any amount of training. Fear, depression, and anger would strike without warning. It buckled my knees and sapped my energy. I learned that the grieving process isn't neat or clean. You stumble through the chaos of a new land and face sides of yourself so foreign that you sometimes look in a mirror to see who's there. In your darkest moments, you don't even recognize your own eyes. The title of my poem, "Through a Glass Darkly," hints at both that estrangement from self and also the fathomless mystery grief represents.[114]

As was the case for so many people, the traumatic experience of the Oklahoma City bombing changed the course of Clark's life. She became highly active in communities of survivors, volunteering at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and travelling internationally to build bonds between populations who had undergone adversity. Reliance on others and leaning on friendships born of common suffering were primary means of recovery for those haunted by

113. Jody Madeira, "We Come Here to Remember," In *Killing McVeigh: The Death Penalty and the Myth of Closure* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 69.
114. *Threnody*, 3.

the Oklahoma City bombing. These groups of mutual support remained vital, not just immediately following the attack, but also for years afterward.[115] These efforts became a central purpose of the remainder of Ernestine Clark's life. Her work with them is noted in her 2013 obituary, and several of the online remembrances note connections to Clark through this important work. Diane Leonard-Koch said, "What a precious soul and spirit Ernestine had. I met her as a result of the bombing. At a time when our hearts were all broken, Ernestine still had that joyful smile and caring spirit in the midst of all the pain."[116] Cecil Elliott shared, "I first met Ernestine after the Oklahoma City Bombing. I was a short distance from her in another building. We both experienced that horrific event. She helped me in ways that I don't think that she realized."[117]

In 2005, Clark was invited to speak at the memorial service commemorating the tenth anniversary of the attack along with President Bill Clinton, Vice President Dick Cheney, and the current and former governors of Oklahoma. In her speech, Clark highlighted the importance of togetherness as a means to healing:

> We are in a room full of friends today—people that we didn't even know ten years ago. The last thing that anyone in this room thought of ten years ago was that we would go through not just deep grieving, with all the sharp nuances that emotional cycle batters you through. None of us could have fathomed experiencing a memorial process or yearly commemorations that would eventually create friendships between people who, before 1995, were strangers or only nodding acquaintances, and yet that very thing happened.[118]

After praising the bonds of community born through adversity, Clark continued her speech on that day with an expression of gratitude and hope for the future:

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115. Madeira, "We Come Here to Remember," 90-91.

116. Obituary for Ernestine Clark, *The Oklahoman*, September 11, 2013, https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/oklahoman/name/ernestine-clark-obituary?id=22376323.

117. Obituary for Ernestine Clark, *The Oklahoman*.

118. Oklahoma City Bombing 10th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony, First Methodist Church, Oklahoma City, April 19, 2005, https://www.c-span.org/program/public-affairs-event/oklahoma-city-bombing-10th-anniversary/141357 (12:20).

> For the beauty of this Oklahoma day, whether calm or windy, cool or warm, clear or cloudy, noisy or strangely quiet, we feel gratitude. For the memories of those deeply soul-searing events of April 19, 1995, we acknowledge again those we shall never forget. We express gratitude that we have connected as families, survivors, rescuers, and community to provide each other hope. For all those gathered here today or linked with us spiritually on these hallowed grounds, we say thanks to God for your lives, for your own inner courage, and for the lifetime that lies ahead for all of us to continue to shape.[119]

Ernestine Clark found her way through the uncertainty of trauma and the darkness of grief to a brighter place of optimism and gratitude. Her ability to look toward a brighter future, while carrying the ever-changing but never-ending pain of loss, inspired those she encountered. Clark's story—surviving a traumatic event, pursuing a soul-searching journey through grief, and eventually finding hope for a more joyful tomorrow—is the narrative that drives her sister's choral-orchestral opus, *Threnody*.

The Genesis of *Threnody*

Two months after the Oklahoma City bombing, in June of 1995, the Hill sisters lost their mother. Ernestine Hill Clark was already overwhelmed with residual trauma from the attack. Nancy Hill Cobb was raising a nine-year-old and a thirteen-year-old while working full time and dealing with recently exposed issues of discrimination in her workplace. Both sisters were already operating at high levels of emotional stress. This was exponentially compounded with the death of their mother and the relocation of their father to a retirement community. In Cobb's words, "Basically everything we were doing was going through the motions and doing what had to be done at that time."[120]

It was not until April of 1996, almost a year after the bombing, that the family was able to be together and just talk. Sisters Ernestine and Nancy spent Easter with their dad at his new

119. Oklahoma City Bombing 10th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony.
120. Nancy Hill Cobb, interview by author, March 16, 2025.

place. It was during this reunion that the family was able to converse about their difficult year. Nancy learned then about Ernestine's journaling, and she realized a possible opportunity for collaboration.

Cobb had been searching for the right text for a new composition on the universality of grief. Michael Hennagin, Cobb's composition teacher at the University of Oklahoma, had recently passed away, and a composition contest in his honor had just been announced. When the Hill family gathered for Easter in 1996, Cobb was considering ideas for a piece that would be submitted to the first biennial Michael Hennagin Prize in Composition. The call that year was for new choral-orchestral works.

Nancy asked Ernestine if she might be willing to share some of her writings for this composition endeavor. Ernestine's response was to turn portions of her prose into a collection of poetry titled "Through A Glass Darkly." In Ernestine's words,

> While I normally do not write in poetic form, I was willing to struggle with it because I knew of my sister's gift for composing wonderful pieces that speak fully to one's heart and soul. If the two of us could produce something that would bring even a small measure of comfort or hope to someone else experiencing grief, then I was obligated to do my best.[121]

Cobb selected portions of Clark's poetry and juxtaposed them with liturgical and Biblical texts. This concept of combining new and traditional writings is an homage to the text compilations of Vaughn Williams in his *Dona Nobis Pacem* and Britten in his *War Requiem*. *Threnody*'s Latin elements are traditional liturgical texts, individually selected to align with inspiration from Clark's poetry. The Biblical text is Psalm 94, which includes the powerful question "Lord, how long will the wicked triumph?" words Cobb had carried with her since she first sang them as part of the Baptist Youth Choir Festival in the eighth grade. When the text

121. *Threnody*, 3.

compilation was complete, Cobb embarked on the composition of *Threnody* in 1996 and spent a considerable amount of time that summer working on it. The piece was completed in 1997.

Cobb's composition honors those whose lives were affected by the April 19 terrorist attack in Oklahoma City, and the work was premiered under the title *Threnody for an April Day*. However, the finished so work clearly reflects the process of grief following any traumatic occurrence that for publication, the name was changed to simply *Threnody*. Central to the piece is Clark's story. According to Cobb, "Every aspect of her text inspired my ability to communicate through music."[122]

Narrative Analysis

The following discussion aims to present an analytical view of *Threnody*, informed by the composer's compositional characteristics and influences as presented in Chapter 2. It attempts both to convey the narrative of *Threnody* and to provide an analysis that may be useful to the modern conductor. Elements that may have interpretive significance are intentionally noted, but this treatment does not attempt to be exhaustive. Conductors who perform their own study of the piece will undoubtedly find more and varied features to highlight. All examples shown in this analysis are taken from the *Threnody* scores published by Hinshaw and are used with permission.[123]

122. *Threnody*, 3.

123. A gratis license was granted to the author by Hinshaw Music (administered by the Fred Bock Publishing Group) in April of 2025.

Overall Musical Characteristics of *Threnody*

Characteristics of Cobb's compositional style were discussed in Chapter 2, and many of these regularly appear in *Threnody*. Her unfolding gesture is prevalent throughout the work, a repeated budding and growth that illustrates *Threnody*'s big-picture expansion from despair to hope, while also generating excitement and rejuvenating energy in certain moments throughout the piece. Third-related harmonic relationships, quartal harmony, and lowered sevenths are frequently employed, and modal influences are present in multiple movements. Cobb's twentieth-century counterpoint makes several appearances as well.

Text setting for intelligibility is paramount in *Threnody*. Particularly important phrases are often set in unison or are unaccompanied. Additionally, rhythmic settings tend to follow syllabic emphasis to promote understanding. This sometimes results in Cobb's characteristic changing and asymmetrical meters, devices she uses not only to promote textual understanding, but also to add rhythmic interest to the music. Intricate and driving rhythms help to paint the text at moments that are especially intense or energetic, and dissonance is used as another word-painting device, often highlighting conflict or distress.

Expressive orchestration is another feature of *Threnody*. Throughout the work, instruments are used to enrich the texture and convey the message of the text. Some instruments, such as the foreboding chime or the delightful glockenspiel, represent specific emotional landscapes. Woodwind, brass, and string instruments enhance the narrative through their various timbres.

Careful voice leading is found throughout the work. Individual voice lines, characteristic to Cobb's writing, move in singable melodic phrases. Voice leading is so deliberate, in fact, that the changing harmony of *Threnody* is often oriented more horizontally than vertically, seemingly

driven by linear voice leading considerations rather than by vertical chord alignment or traditional harmonic progression.

Two symbolic musical devices appear repeatedly in Threnody: the tritone and the descending minor second. The tritone, also known as the devil's interval, contributes to dissonant text painting and also symbolizes evil during some of *Threnody*'s darkest moments. The descending melodic minor second is ubiquitous in this work, especially in the earlier movements. Known as a musical sigh, this gesture conveys grief and despondency, emotions that are prevalent in the poignant text. The minor second also appears in ascending and in harmonic forms, often expanded to a minor ninth. These and other dissonant intervals are an important part of *Threnody*'s musical conflict.

In *Threnody*, tonality is often obscured through chromaticism, dissonance, or ambiguous quartal or quintal harmony, all of which can intensify moments of uncertainty or anguish. Conversely, hopeful or pleasant textual moments are often highlighted by major keys, bright instruments, and stable harmonic language. These and other musical characteristics are presented in the following analysis as they are observed in each movement.

Structure of Analysis

Threnody is a through-composed work in six movements. This narrative analysis discusses each movement sequentially. Since Cobb's writing begins with consideration of the text, the following sections each begin by presenting the movement's text in italics. Unless otherwise indicated, English texts are from "Through A Glass Darkly" by Ernestine Hill Clark. Latin texts are liturgical, and English translations are shown directly to the right.

An introduction to each movement follows the text. This introduction discusses how the movement fits into the larger narrative as well as its function within *Threnody*. Significant musical ideas found in the movement are presented, and the structure of the movement for the purposes of this analysis is outlined.

A structural table for each movement shows the divisions that have been determined for this analysis. Sections are labelled numerically or, when fitting, according to their characteristics. Within the table, information is included only if it represents a change from the previous section. Following the table, the movement is discussed according to its structural divisions in a section-by-section narrative analysis.

Movement I: Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei,	*Lamb of God,*
qui tollis peccata mundi,	*who takes away the sins of the world,*
miserere nobis.	*have mercy on us.*
Dona nobis pacem.	*Grant us peace.*

The first movement of *Threnody* foreshadows the rest of the work. It is a prayer for peace, set to music that evokes uncertainty and impending conflict. According to Cobb, her intention with this text selection was the sentiment "have mercy, as in, we don't know what's going to come."[124] This, like all of *Threnody*'s textual compilation, was inspired by the words of Ernestine Clark.

Musical characteristics include the unexpected: sudden leaps in conjunct melodic lines, surprising harmonic resolutions, and unanticipated chromaticism. Cobb's unfolding gesture recurs in this movement, as does her characteristic dynamic variation, rhythmically enhanced

124. Cobb, interview, Mar 2025.

text setting, colorful orchestration, third-related keys, and deliberate voice leading. The musical sigh is present, signaling foretold sadness, and consonance and dissonance enhance the emotional oscillation between stability and uncertainty. Especially poignant textual moments are heightened by unison settings or by the absence of instruments.

For the purposes of this narrative analysis, the movement is separated into five sections. The first is an instrumental introduction, given its own treatment here because of its importance in setting up the work. Three sections follow that each begin with "Agnus Dei, Agnus Dei, Agnus Dei." Each of these sections is similar, but with notable differences. The sections build upon each other, expanding in dynamic range, vocal tessitura, and orchestration, until the climax of the movement is reached. The movement ends with a coda, made up of new text and new musical material. The structure of the first movement is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Structure of "Agnus Dei" (mvt. I)

Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
Instrumental Opening	mm. 1-7 (7 bars)	(none)	(none)	E minor	quarter = 60 4/4	clarinet solo strings
1st Agnus Dei Section	mm. 8-13 (6 bars)	Liturgical	Agnus Dei…		4/4, 2/4	oboe & bassoon timpani lower strings
2nd Agnus Dei Section	mm. 14-23 (10 bars)	Liturgical	Agnus Dei…		5/4, 4/4	all woodwinds timpani all strings
3rd Agnus Dei Section	mm. 24-30 (7 bars)	Liturgical	Agnus Dei…	E minor to C minor	4/4, 2/4	woodwinds brass timpani strings
Coda	mm. 31-39 (9 bars)	Liturgical	Dona nobis pacem…	C minor to E minor	4/4, 2/4	lower strings clarinet solo

Measures 1-7: Instrumental Opening

Threnody's first movement opens with Cobb's characteristic unfolding gesture. The strings establish the tonic pitch with a sustained unison E and then gently move away from it by steps in both directions. The alternating consonance and dissonance immediately create a sense of tension and release, a feature of the entire the work.

In m. 4, a melancholy clarinet solo begins with an ascending minor ninth, a dissonant interval that returns throughout *Threnody*, often creating a sense of disjoined discomfort. It is immediately followed by the sighing gesture of a descending minor second, another recurring element, this one lending a mournful quality to the opening of the piece. The remainder of the clarinet solo is a sorrowful melody made up of steps and skips in alternating directions that gradually descends until it arrives back at the tonic pitch (Ex. 3.1).

Example 3.1. Opening clarinet solo, mvt. I, mm. 4-6 (transposed for B-flat clarinet).



Versions of this woodwind melody appear as interludes between the major sections, each one recognizable by three identical opening pitches. As the clarinet solo ends, the low strings begin a plodding E pedal tone that undergirds most of the movement.
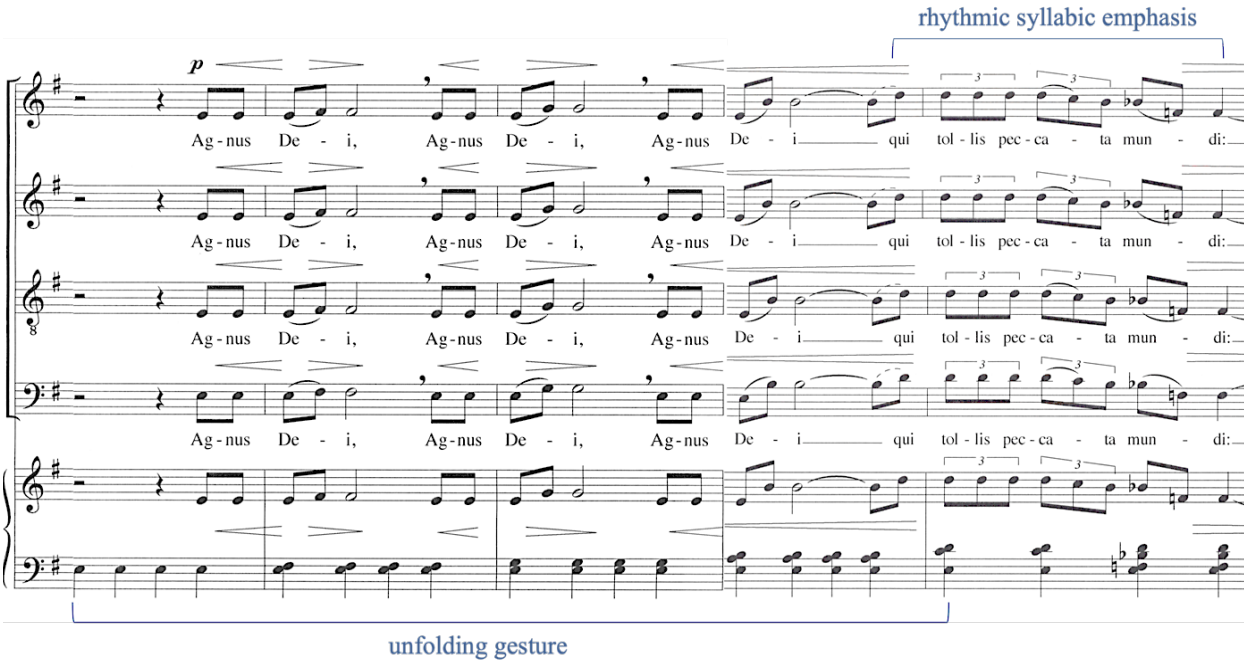
Measures 8-13: First "Agnus Dei" Section

The first "Agnus Dei" section is sung by SATB voices in unison, enhancing the poignancy of the opening petition to the "Lamb of God." Voices are enriched by the color of

double reeds, and their melody through this section is arc-shaped, travelling from the tonic pitch (E) up to the seventh (D) and back down to the tonic. The dynamics gently mirror this arc shape.

Voices begin by singing a soft repeat of "Agnus Dei." The end of each phrase gradually ascends, aligning with another unfolding gesture in the strings, until the end of the third statement arrives at "qui tollis peccata mundi." This is the peak of section one, which is set in triplets, dramatizing and enhancing the syllabic emphasis of the text (Ex. 3.2).

Example 3.2. Unfolding gesture and rhythmic syllabic emphasis, mvt. I, mm. 7-11 (reduction).



The end of this section occurs in mm. 12-13 as voices, still unison, sing "miserere nobis" ("have mercy on us") on a repeated lowered second and then descend a semitone to the tonic pitch where they began. This arrival occurs as the strings reach a haunting open fifth, musically highlighting the uncertainty of what is to come.

Measures 14-23: Second "Agnus Dei" Section

The second "Agnus Dei" section is introduced by another clarinet solo. Set in 5/4, this melody is recognizable because of its instrumentation as well as its first three pitches. Like the solo in m. 4, the one in m. 14 also begins with a minor ninth followed by a musical sigh. As the clarinet solo ends, the E pedal tone is reestablished by the timpani and lower strings, providing a sense of stability following the chromaticism of the clarinet solo.

Voices enter in m. 15 with "Agnus Dei." This second section is like the first in its arc shape, in terms of both dynamics and pitch relationships, and in its timbre, created by the doubling of oboes and bassoons. This section varies, however, in that voices enter a fifth higher than before. They begin on a unison B and then immediately unfold in contrary motion to create the first vocal harmony of the piece. This harmony is oriented more horizontally than vertically, which is a recurring feature throughout *Threnody*. As is characteristic of Cobb's writing, the focus is on voice leading and the harmonies that result from the melodic journey of each vocal line.
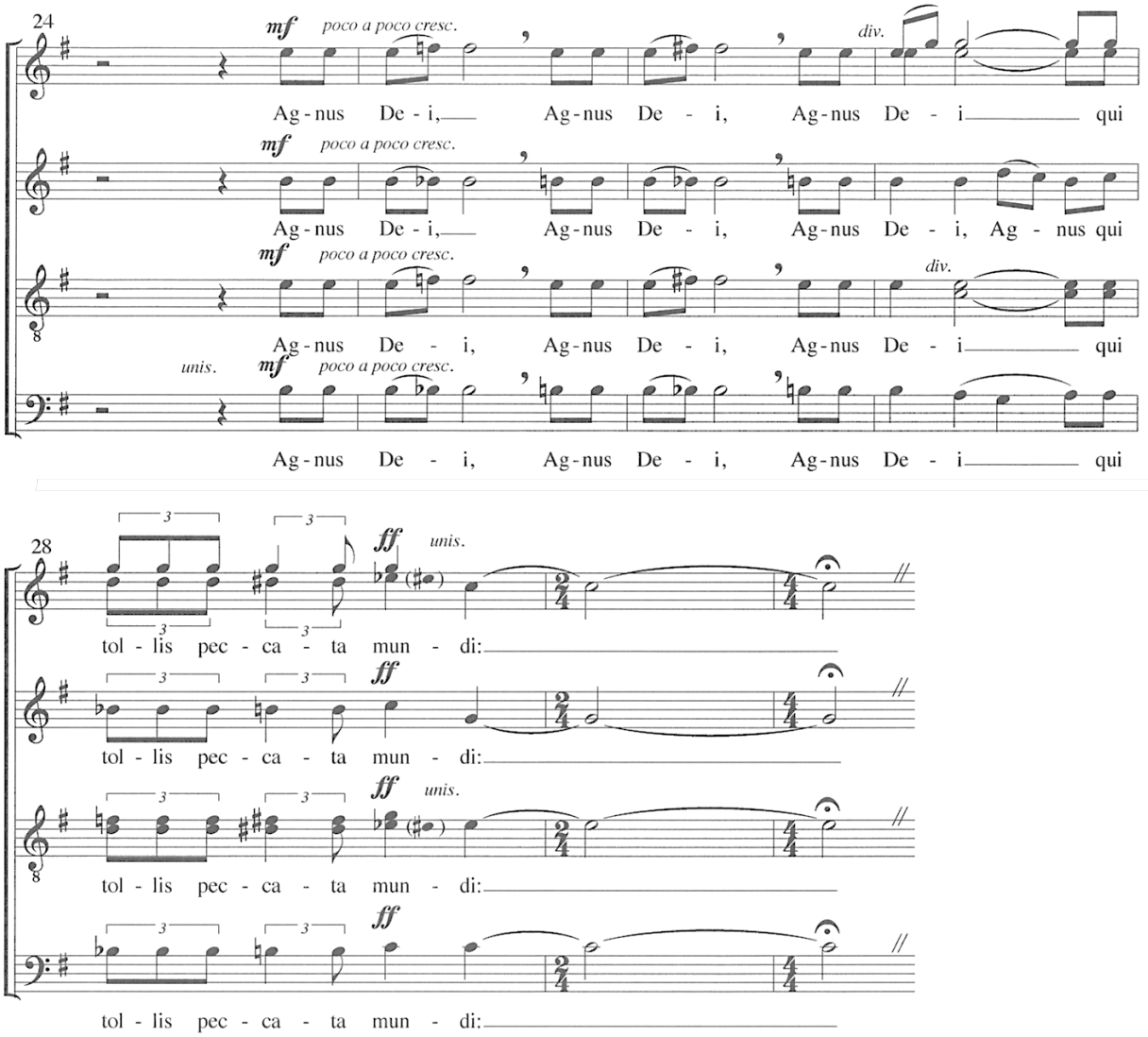
By the third "Agnus Dei" of section two (m. 18), the voices are in four-part harmony. The pinnacle of the section occurs in the next measure as the sopranos arrive at the upper tonic enhanced by the first entrance of the flute. The climactic m. 19 sees a significant amount of dissonance in both vocal and instrumental parts, driven by chromaticism in the lower voices, second oboe, bassoons, and strings. The end of this section is a thrice sung "have mercy on us" that tapers dynamically and descends through a rich non-diatonic harmonic sequence enriched by strings and woodwinds, the chromatic descent foreshadowing the onset of grief before eventually settling into a stable E-minor final chord.

Measures 24-30: Third "Agnus Dei" Section

The third and final "Agnus Dei" section is preceded by only one measure of instrumental material. The E pedal tone has returned, and another mournful clarinet melody appears, this time doubled by bassoon. This melody begins like the previous clarinet solos but then unexpectedly turns upward, leading into the final and most intense of the three major sections.

In this final "Agnus Dei" section, voices enter in m. 24 at mezzo forte and crescendo to fortissimo. This time, there is no arc-shaped tapering off. The voices begin in harmony on the first and fifth and then unfold, culminating in six-part harmony and the highest and loudest vocal moments of the piece thus far. The musical intensification is heightened by brass instruments and suspended cymbal, portraying a desperate, guttural cry for mercy. The volume level remains at fortissimo, and the sopranos stay at their peak tone of G5 through mm. 27-28 while the other voices ascend by semitones under them. The result is a characteristically Cobb modulation that, with careful voice leading, moves the piece from E minor to C minor, a third-related key (Ex. 3.3).

Example 3.3. Voice leading into third-related key modulation, mvt. I, mm. 24-30.

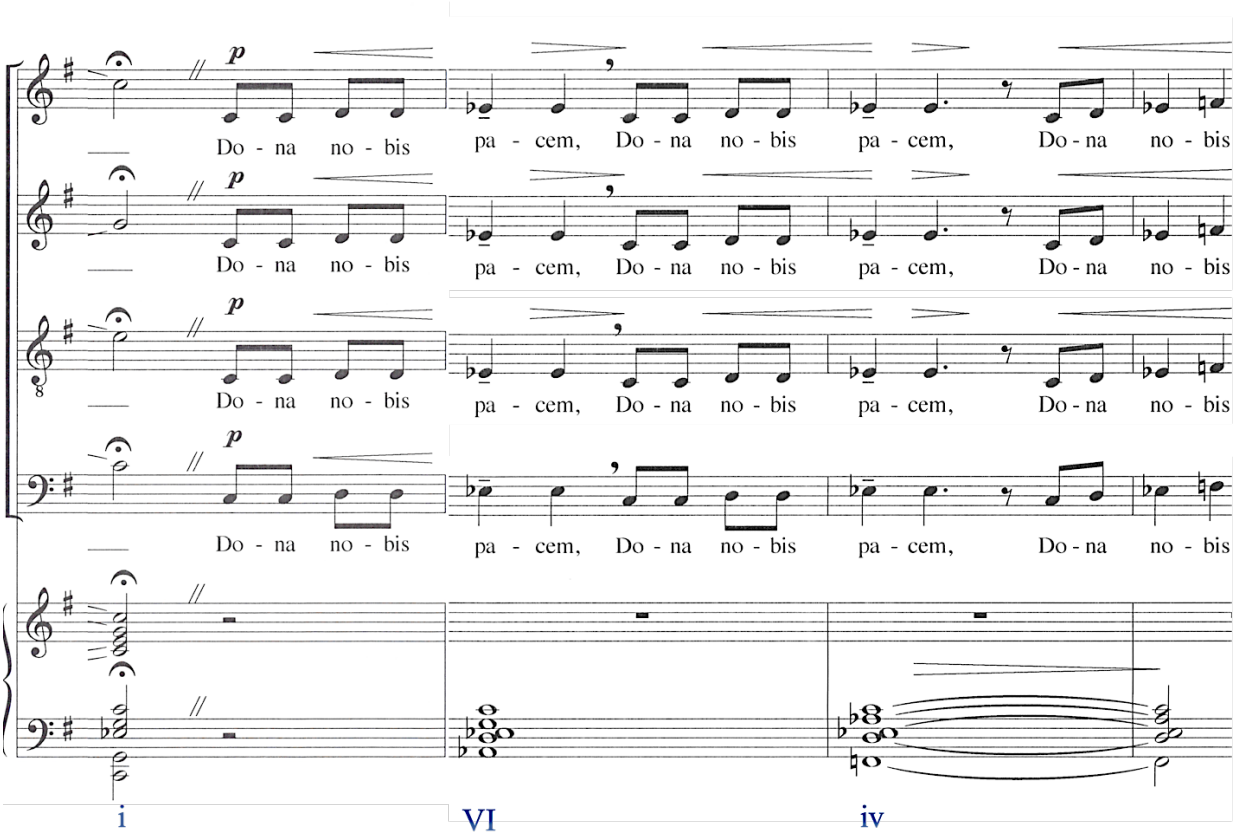


Measures 31-39: Coda

Now firmly in C minor, a coda appears as unaccompanied unison voices begin singing a quiet plea for peace. “Dona nobis pacem” is stated softly three times. The first two statements are a simple stepwise melody accompanied by whole-note chords in the low strings. The harmonic movement can be interpreted as descending from i (C minor) to VI (A-flat major) followed by iv

(F minor) in root position with added tones. This progression hints at the peaceful resolution of a plagal cadence to underscore the text “grant us peace” (Ex. 3.4).

Example 3.4. Progression hinting at plagal cadence, mvt. I, mm. 30-33 (reduction).

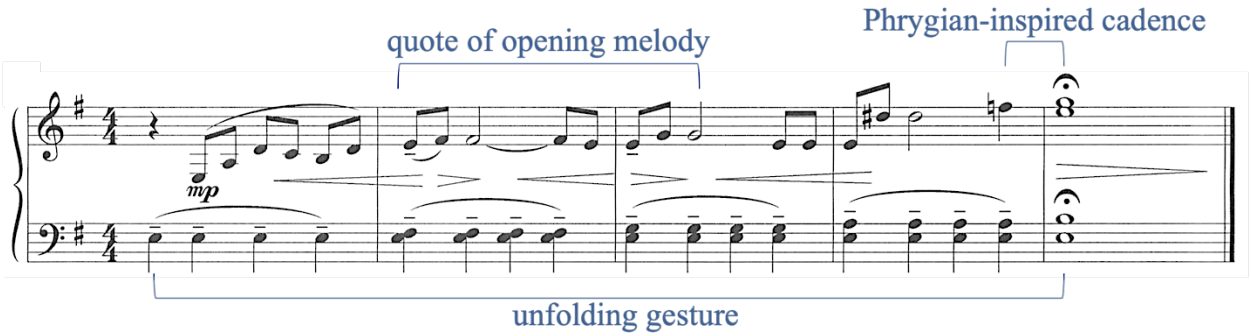


However, instead of proceeding to the expected C-minor resolution, unison unaccompanied voices unexpectedly sing a disjointed leap of an ascending minor sixth from F up to D and then descend from D to C to B, arriving at the fifth of E minor in m. 35. The “amen cadence” is interrupted, the harmonic language does not resolve to C minor, and the anticipated peace does not come.

The final five measures of the movement see the unfolding gesture recur in the strings, beginning on the tonic pitch of E minor and opening to the fifth. At the same time, the clarinet

solo makes a final appearance, now low in its range, and quotes the opening "Agnus Dei" phrases. The second clarinet player joins just as the melody makes an unexpected leap of a major seventh, foreshadowing the discomfort ahead. The lowered second in the penultimate measure creates a Phrygian-inspired cadence. These elements are shown in Example 3.5.

Example 3.5. Final five measures of mvt. I, mm. 35-39 (reduction).



The movement ends with a single chime, foreshadowing what is to come.

Movement II: O Lord God Unto Whom Vengeance Belongeth

> *O Lord God, unto whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Lift up thyself thou judge of the earth. Render a reward to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked triumph? They break in pieces thy people, they slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. (from Psalm 94)*

One moment, quiet sunlight, one moment filled with joy.
One moment farewells sharing, no foreboding of what's to come.
One moment of our goodbyes, one brief and quiet hug.
One child to give a kiss to, one father's arm a tug.
One mother's lilting laughter that echoed down the way.
Eternities of memories now endlessly replay.
The heaviness of sorrow will never go away.

Suddenly, no preparation, fire and terror fill the sky!
Diamond shards of glass and horror splinter through the air.
Fire and light malevolent send lives to graves of deep despair.
Frantic voices cry in horror, "My wife's in there, my daughter, too."
Shock-white faces struggle for clues.

Sirens, alarms, confusion, chaos, rumors. All lies.
Whirling, swirling into the sky. Grotesque, obscene.
Blown to bits from something to nothing.
Appointment with hell, the devil to pay.

But why these angels, why these souls?
Why our friends, our neighbors, our children?
What have we done to deserve such punishment?
An answer's demanded! Silence replies.

The second movement of *Threnody* is a poetic recounting of the attack, bookended by painful, humanity-revealing questions. The first, from Psalm 94, asks "Lord, how long will the wicked triumph?" Cobb selected this verse for this movement having wrestled with its words for several decades. She says, "That text stuck in my mind all my life from the time I was in the eighth grade. For some reason it was burned into my memory. It is such a profound text."[125]

125. Cobb, interview, Mar 2025.

Following the challenging Psalm text, this through-composed movement relives the story of the bombing, portraying how peaceful lives were shattered in an instant, using voices and instruments to paint the terror of that day. The movement ends with difficult questions that came after the chaos, beginning with the realistic, guttural human response of "Why?"

Musical characteristics of this intense movement include extreme dynamic changes, rhythmic drive and complexity, and the prevalent use of quartal harmonies to obscure tonality and instigate harmonic change. This movement also sees the presence of Cobb's unfolding gesture and highly expressive orchestration that, for the first time in the work, utilizes all instruments including the piano. Cobb's characteristic third relationships are present, as is her counterpoint and her treatment of text as paramount. Text painting is done through rhythmic settings as well as dissonance and orchestration, and important words and phrases are sometimes echoed by instruments for emphasis. At other times, the orchestration disappears altogether, clarifying the most important textual moments and promoting intelligibility for the listener. The tritone, known as the devil's interval, is used explicitly in this movement, serving as a musical depiction of the evil forces at work in the gruesome story.

This movement, like most of *Threnody*, is through-composed, further evidence that text is the driver of musical choices. The following analysis considers the movement in seven parts. The first section is instrumental. The next three sections utilize the Psalm 94 text, and the last three sections employ Clark's poetry. Additional structural information is available in Table 2.

Table 2: Structure of "O Lord God Unto Whom Vengeance Belongeth" (mvt. II)
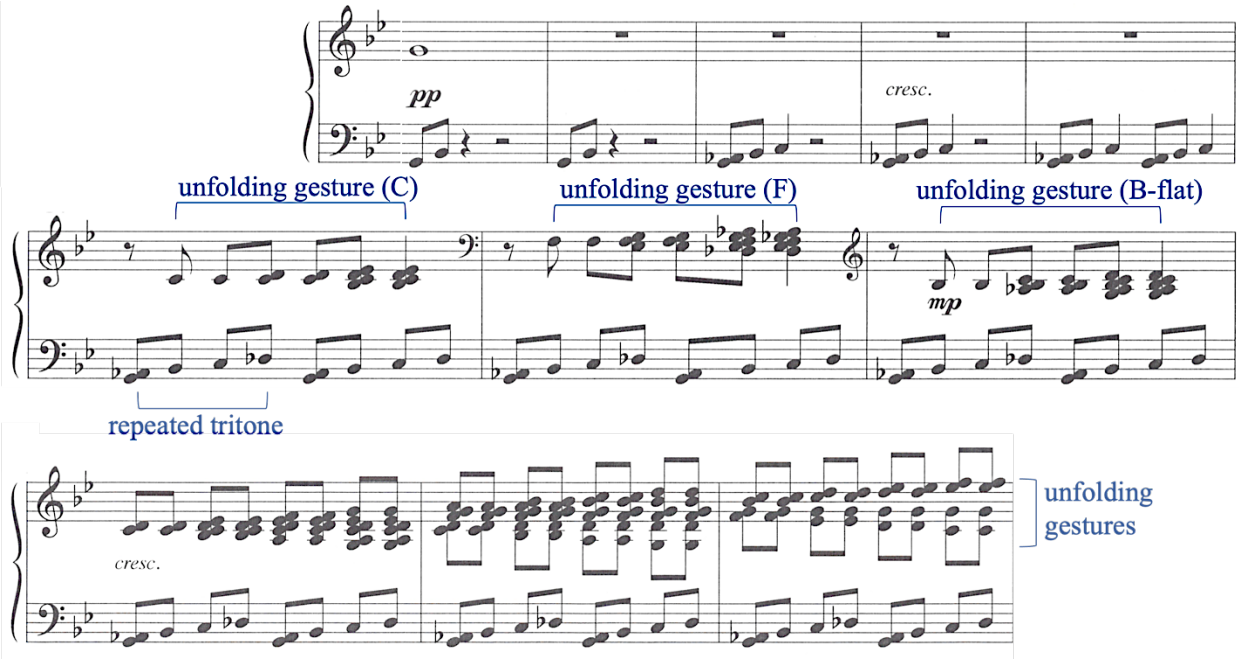
Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
Instrumental Opening	mm. 1-19 (19 bars)	(none)	(none)	G minor	quarter = 132 4/4	building to full orchestra
Homophonic #1	mm. 20-42 (23 bars)	Psalm 94	O Lord God…		4/4, 2/4	full orchestra
Contrapuntal	mm. 43-56 (14 bars)	Psalm 94	Lift up thyself…	D minor (unstable)	4/4	full orchestra
Homophonic #2	mm. 57-74 (18 bars)	Psalm 94	Lord, how long…	A-flat minor to B minor	Much Slower quarter = 80 4/4	full orchestra, unaccompanied moments
Peaceful Precursor	mm. 75-95 (21 bars)	Clark poetry	One moment, quiet sunlight…	B minor	quarter = 69 4/4	woodwinds horns glockenspiel strings (transitional: tuba, percussion)
Bombing	mm. 96-117 (22 bars)	Clark poetry	Suddenly…	B minor (unstable)	Tempo I 5/4, 3/4, 4/4, 6/4	full orchestra
"Why?"	mm. 118-128 (11 bars)	Clark poetry	But why these angels…	B-flat minor to C minor	Adagio quarter = 66 4/4, 3/4, 5/4	full orchestra, unaccompanied moments

Measures 1-19: Instrumental Opening

Nine solitary chimes open this movement, signifying the hour forever imprinted on minds and hearts of all affected by the Oklahoma City bombing: 9:00 a.m. The G-pitched chime, which concluded the previous movement as the third of E minor, is now the tonic of the new G-minor tonality. As each chime dies away, its pitch bending and fading, uncertainty is reiterated. Low instruments enter first, articulating a minor third that establishes G minor. Gradually, more pitches are added in a driving eighth-note rhythm. The bass line expands to emphasize a tritone,

foreshadowing the adversity to come, as the other instruments unfold to form dissonant cluster chords (Ex 3.6).

Example 3.6. Tritone interval in bass, unfolding in orchestration, mvt. II, mm. 9-19 (reduction).



Nods to minimalism can be seen in the repetition, the steady eighth-note rhythmic pattern, and the clustered sounds. Lowered second and fifth scale degrees contribute to the escalating dissonance, emphasizing minor seconds and tritones respectively. The orchestration expands and builds to fortissimo over eleven measures, and the mounting intensity sets up the righteous anger of the text.

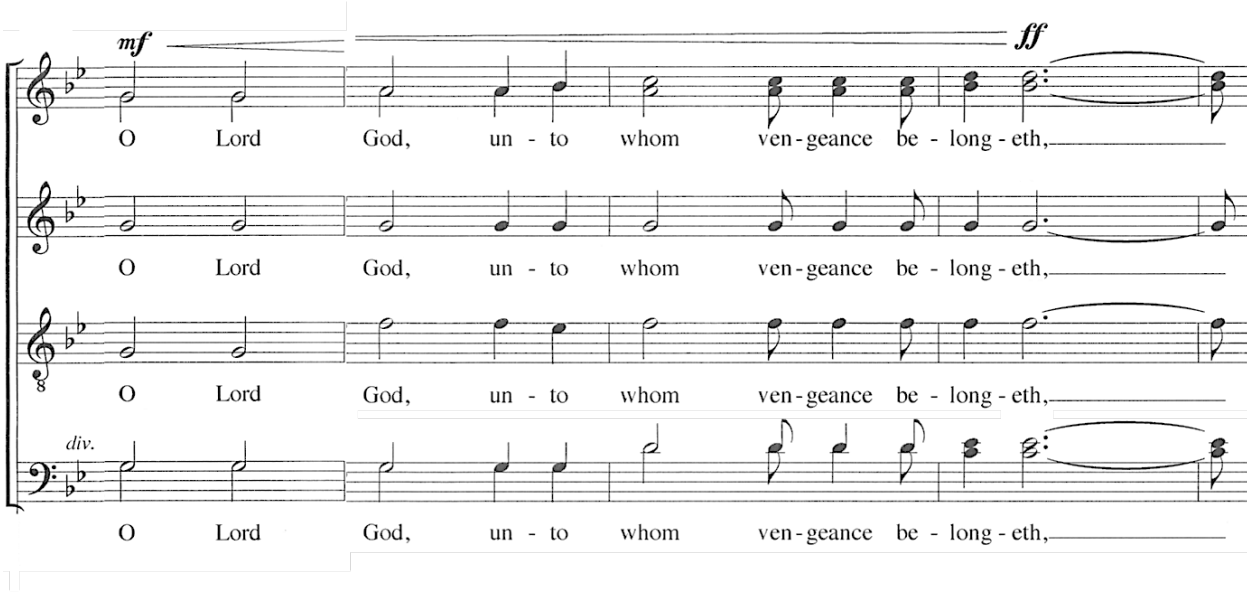
Measures 20-42: Homophonic #1

At m. 20, the choir enters forcefully on a tonic-dominant open fifth spread over two octaves and then moves by semitones, emulating the bending tones of the opening chimes. The initial statements of "O Lord God" in mm. 20-23 employ Cobb's characteristic use of quartal

harmony in the voice parts along with the first use of the rhythmically conflicting two against three, with triplets in the upper woodwinds and eighth notes in the bassoons, timpani, piano, and strings. These musical devices serve to express the text's cry out to God, full of intensity and inner conflict.

When the first full statement of "O Lord God unto whom vengeance belongeth" appears beginning in m. 24, Cobb's unfolding gesture is on full display, along with an extreme dynamic build from mezzo forte to fortissimo over just four measures (Ex. 3.7).

Example 3.7. Unfolding gesture and dynamic build in voice parts, mvt. II, mm. 24-27.

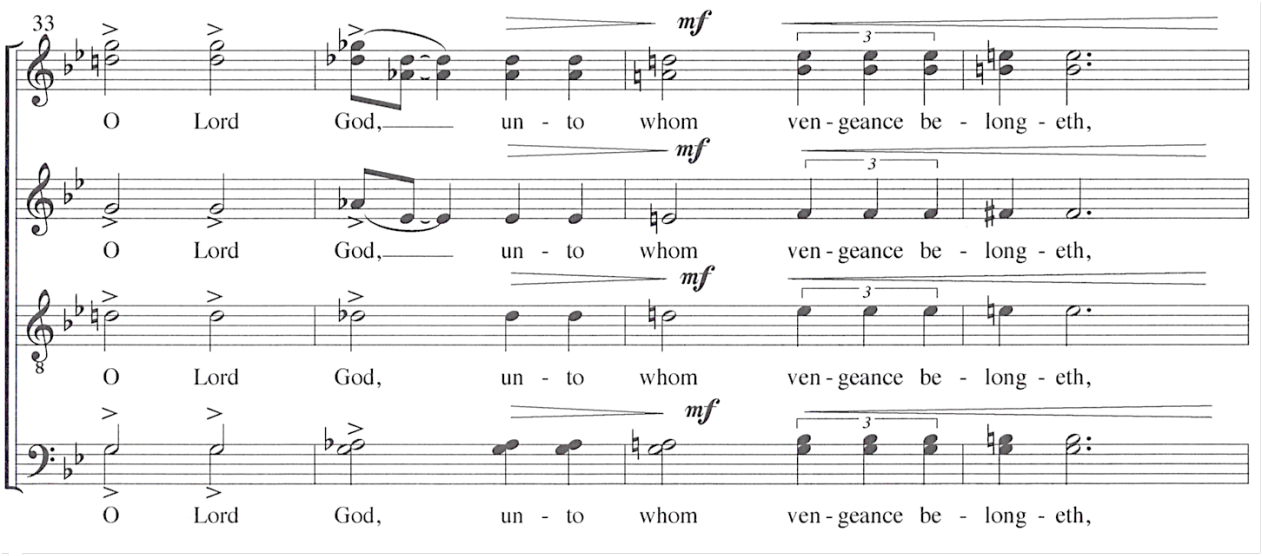


Also at this point, and for the first time in the movement, the voice parts are doubled, allowing the woodwinds and piano to accentuate and texturize the crescendo that intensifies the words "vengeance belongeth." A notable rhythmic change also occurs during this phrase in the bass and cello parts as rests appear on beats two and four.

At m. 28, the orchestra returns to a hushed mezzo-piano, commencing an instrumental interlude that is an abbreviated version of the mounting orchestral opening. This builds into a

return of the initial vocal material at m. 31. This time, however, rather than culminating in the unfolding gesture, the quartal harmony continues. From measures 31 to 36, quartal harmony, developed through careful voice leading, creates harmonic instability over a repeated G in the bass voice (Ex. 3.8).

Example 3.8. Quartal harmony over G in bass, mvt. II, mm. 33-36.



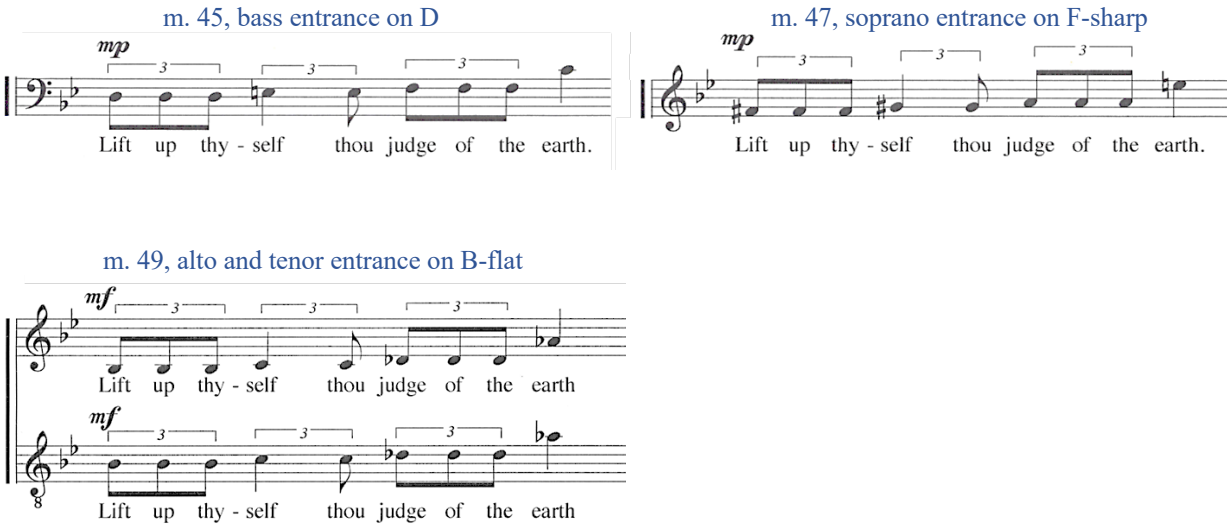
The pursuit of harmonic stability continues as the text portrays a desperate search for God. As the choir sings three repetitions of "show thyself" in mm. 37-42, the tonality, emphasized by homophonic chords in the voice parts and arpeggios in the orchestration, moves through F minor and D-flat major to eventually arrive in D minor.

Measures 43-56: Contrapuntal

With D minor firmly established, an extreme fortissimo to pianissimo decrescendo takes place in the orchestra over three measures, setting up the quiet contrapuntal section that follows. Showcasing Cobb's penchant for third-related keys, the first statement of the theme starts on D

(m. 45), the second starts on F-sharp (m. 47), the third starts on B-flat, or an enharmonic A-sharp (m. 49). This can be seen in Example 3.9. The theme features a conjunct melody that is suddenly interrupted by a disjunct leap of a fifth, and the range of the repeated melody is a jarring minor seventh.

Example 3.9. Contrapuntal statements, mvt. II, mm. 45, 47, 49.



Homophonic iterations of the theme follow, showcasing a dramatic unfolding gesture beginning on D in m. 51, and foreshadowing the powerful homophonic section to follow.

Measures 57-74: Homophonic #2
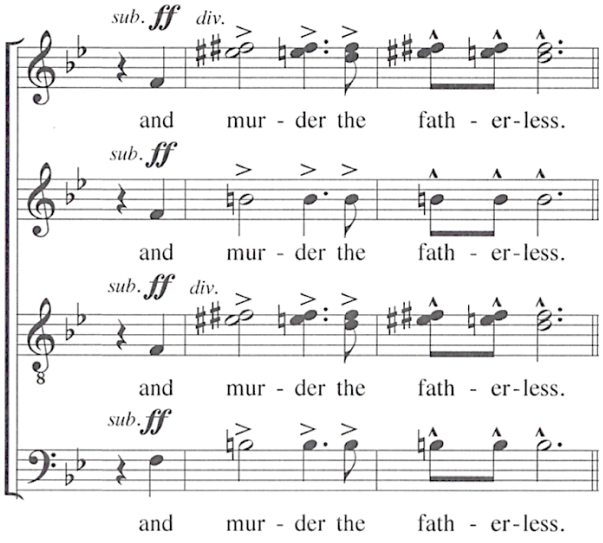
A descending bass line announces a fortissimo A-flat minor chord on the downbeat of m. 57 for the desperate, weighty question, “Lord, how long will the wicked triumph?” The tempo is markedly slower, and the harmonic progression follows a pattern of ascending minor thirds, from A-flat minor (enharmonically G-sharp minor) to B minor to D minor. Voices are doubled by

brass instruments, adding textural intensity to the heated inquiry. Descending sixteenth-note scales in the high woodwinds and strings create an atmosphere of urgency, their descending pattern highlighting the darkness of the question at hand.

Beginning in m. 59, quartal harmony obscures the tonality as the choir sings a repeat of the bewildered question, "Lord, how long will the wicked triumph?" The inquiry is undergirded by tritone-emphasizing scales in the flutes, oboes, and violins, adding to the sense of disorientation. "Triumph" is repeated twice as dynamics fade and the orchestration becomes thinner. Lower voices and strings descend by minor seconds, recalling the desolate musical sighing gesture.

The section ends unaccompanied, first with the poignant "They break in pieces thy people, they slay the widow and the stranger," all sung on a pianissimo unison F. Without warning, a subito fortissimo shatters the mood with dissonant intervals lending aural conflict to "murder the fatherless" while a tritone leap in the bass helps to set up the new tonality of B minor (Ex. 3.10).

Example 3.10. Dissonant text painting in unaccompanied voices, mvt. II, mm. 70-71.



Afterward, brass instruments restate the “fatherless” music an octave lower than the voices, first with the same note values, and then augmented from eighth notes into half notes.
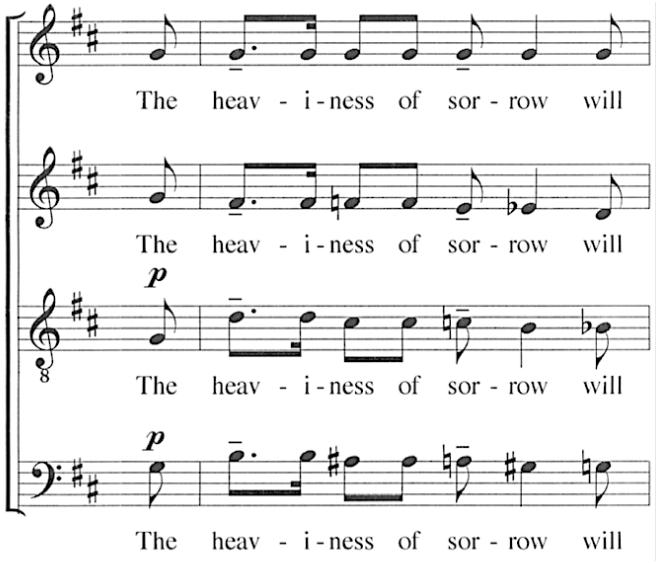
Measures 75-95: Peaceful Precursor

It is here, just beyond the halfway point of the second movement, that Clark’s poetry first appears. The text paints a picture of the moments just before tragedy, when things are peaceful and happy and still. The unison B-minor melody is undergirded by gentle syncopation in the strings on the tonic and dominant pitches. At first, clarinet alone doubles the melody. Later, it is joined by flute, each instrument adding light, simple color to the innocence described in the text.

When the voices expand to sing in lush four-part harmony beginning in m. 83, they are enhanced by the texture of the full woodwind choir in a rhythmic setting that follows the natural syllabic emphasis of the text. The harmonic motion here is creative, using C-natural in the melody as an unexpected turning point. First, it appears on beat three of m. 83 as a chromatic neighbor tone that does not change the key. Then two measures later, the C-natural appears again, this time instigating a shift that briefly obscures the tonality.

Stability returns in m. 87, and the sound of the glockenspiel adds a mirthful air to “one mother’s lilting laughter.” It is a lovely moment of respite that ends with parallel minor triads descending chromatically into “the heaviness of sorrow” (Ex. 3.11), accompanied by the orchestral color of horns and lower instruments.

Example 3.11. Chromatic descent in lower voices, mvt. II, m. 91.

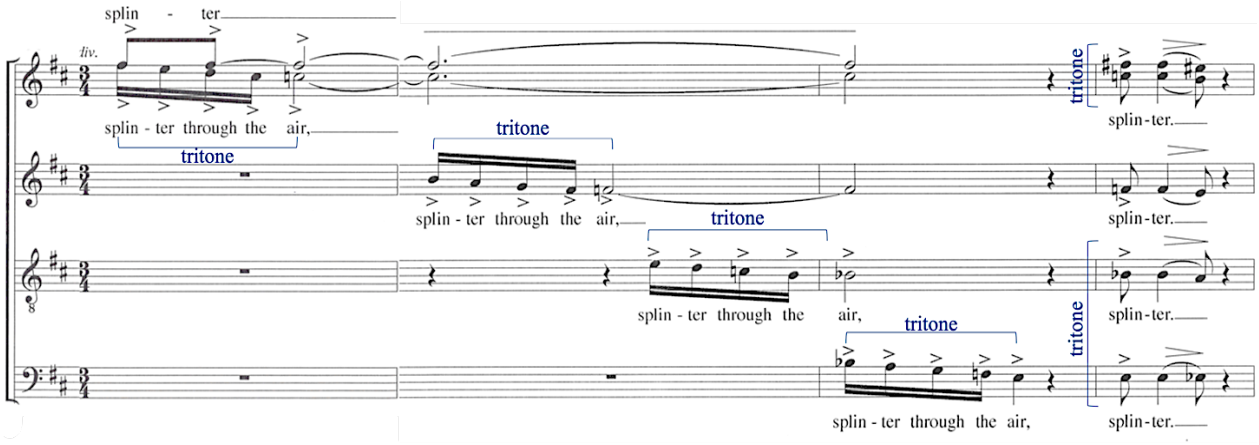


This quiet, slowing descent is followed by a chromatic arrival at a B-minor chord and a low, mournful instrumental melody that descends from the sighing gesture to the new tonic pitch.

Measures 96-117: Bombing
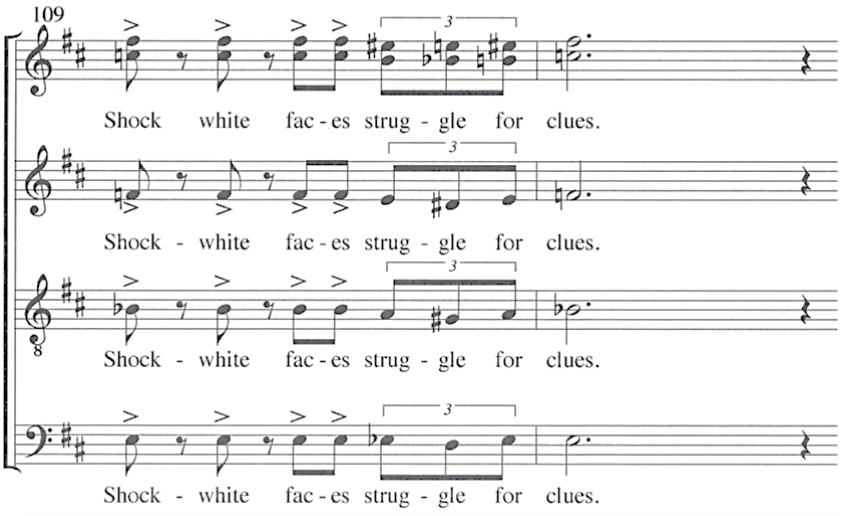
Swiftly, the timpani and suspended cymbal crescendo into an angry 5/4 meter. Accented voices sing the story of the bombing in driving rhythms, each phrase broken by striking interruptions from the percussion and piano. A change to 3/4 time occurs as voices splinter off to sing "splinter through the air" in descending sixteenth-note patterns highlighted by xylophone, each spanning the interval of a tritone, the devil's interval. Syncopated homophony then reiterates the tritone interval harmonically, emphasizing the horror of this evil act (Ex. 3.12).

Example 3.12. “Splinter” text painting and tritone patterns, mvt. II, mm. 99-102.



This pattern is repeated with new text beginning in m. 107, this time ending in extended parallel motion that further obscures the tonality (Ex. 3.13).

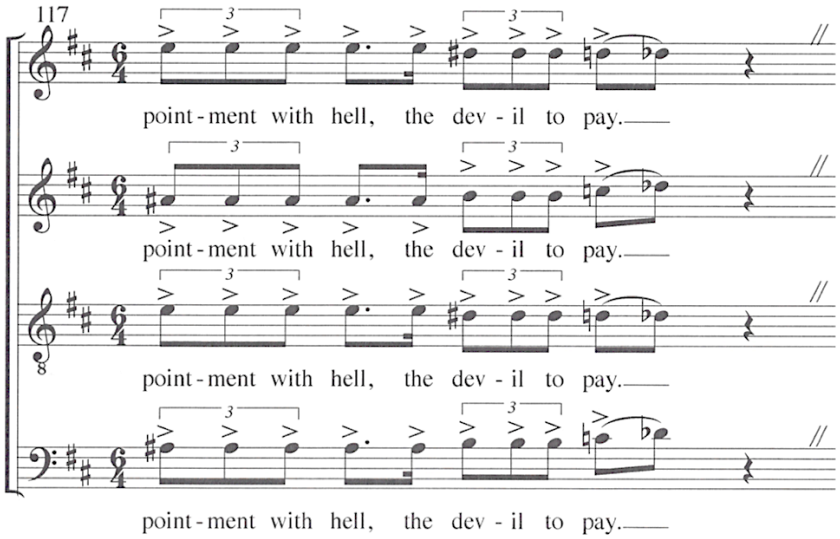
Example 3.13. Parallel motion, mvt. II, mm. 109-110.



In m. 111, voices begin at a unison mezzo piano and then build again, displaying another unfolding gesture that ends in a sudden melodic major seventh. The dissonant interval is repeated several times by violins and percussion as the choir holds the disagreeable word “lies.” In a dramatic illustration of rhythmic text paining, the words “whirling” and “swirling” are set in

undulating triplets, immediately followed by “grotesque” and “obscene” in militaristic dotted rhythms. This vibrant rhythmic text setting continues as a reverse unfolding gesture moves the harmony from the devil’s tritone to an angelic unison, setting up the text that follows as well as the new key (Ex. 3.14).

Example 3.14. Unfolding gesture in reverse, from tritone to unison, mvt. II, m. 11



Measures 118-128: “Why?”

The final section of the second movement begins in B-flat minor with six-part choral sonorities supported by the entire orchestra playing whole-note chords. It is even more striking then when the voices decrescendo from the initial fortissimo to a hushed mezzo piano as the orchestra dwindles to nothing. With no accompaniment, the importance of the text is paramount, as unison singers quietly ask, “What have we done to deserve such punishment?” The voices then suddenly crescendo through disjointed leaps to arrive at the final tonality of C minor.

“An answer’s demanded” is repeated by unaccompanied voices at fortissimo, and the first two pleas are each followed by an emphatic C minor chord from the orchestra. The last time

though, in a moment that recalls "Baal, We Cry to Thee" from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, there is no answer. After six long beats of silence, quiet voices end the movement alone in a descending minor-second sigh that resembles a Phrygian cadence.

Movement III: Absalom, Fili Mi

Absalom, fili mi,	*Absalom, my son,*
quis mihi tribuat ut ego moriar pro te.	*would that I could have died for you.*

Grief seals my soul in concrete.
Frozen, immobile, soul buried alive.
My heart's an empty sack.
Screams strangle my throat.
Where are you, God? Where are you now?

My heart was torn open that day, shredded 'til blood and nerves were raw.
My heart an empty sack, in a numbed, stunned body.
Take me to a world where terror's unknown,
Where quaking souls can relax, take ease.
Take me to a world where no man kills another.
Where children play in innocence and countries are at peace.

Threnody's third movement is a portrait of the intensity and rawness of grief. It is the emotional aftermath of trauma and loss. Clark's poetry is desperate, shattered, numb, questioning, and bewildered. Cobb selected the Latin text based on Clark's writing: "When her poetry spoke of the grief of a parent, my thoughts immediately went to David's lament, 'Absalom, fili mi.'"[126] This movement is the solitary instance in which poetic and liturgical texts are sung at the same time.

"Absalom, fili mi" is the only movement that begins and ends in the same key. It also begins and ends with the same text, perhaps indicating the ever-present nature of grief. Musical

126. *Threnody*, 3.

features of the movement include dissonance, counterpoint, chromaticism, descending phrases, and text setting for intelligibility. As seen in many parts of *Threnody*, important phrases of text tend to be unison or unaccompanied. Other notable Cobb characteristics in this movement include the unfolding gesture and third relationships.

This narrative analysis is structured in six parts. The first section of "Absalom, Fili Mi" has liturgical text. The second section juxtaposes Latin liturgical texts with Clark's poetry. The remaining four sections alternate between Clark's poetry and liturgical Latin as seen in Table 3.
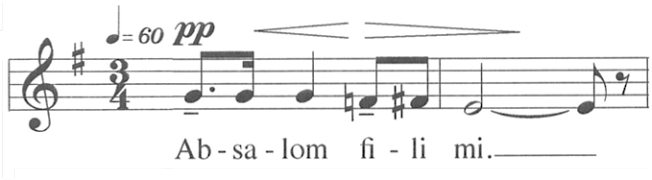
Table 3: Structure of "Absalom, Fili Mi" (mvt. III)

Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
1	mm. 1-11 (11 bars)	Liturgical	Absalom, fili mi…	E minor	quarter = 60 3/4	clarinet low strings
2	mm. 12-20 (9 bars)	Clark poetry Liturgical	Grief seals my soul in concrete… Absalom, fili mi…		3/4, 2/4	clarinet trombones all strings
3	mm. 21-27 (7 bars)	Clark poetry	My heart was torn open that day…		3/4, 2/4, 4/4	woodwinds brass (no trombone) timpani piano strings
4	mm. 28-39 (12 bars)	Liturgical	Absalom, fili mi, quis mihi tribuat…		3/4	oboe clarinet bassoon strings
5	mm. 40-47 (8 bars)	Clark poetry	Take me to a world where terror's unknown…		5/4, 3/4, 4/4, 2/4	horns clarinets strings
6	mm. 48-57 (10 bars)	Liturgical	Absalom, fili mi…		3/4	strings woodwind quartet

Measures 1-11: "Absalom, fili mi"

Hearkening back to the opening of the work, the third movement begins with chimes. This time, there are three. This movement is the emotional aftermath that began at 9:03 a.m.[127] The repeated chime also serves a practical purpose: establishing the G4 for the soprano and alto entrance. Like the first movement, "Absalom, Fili Mi" begins in E minor, and the clarinet plays a featured role. Unison treble voices, doubled by the timbre of clarinet, set up the movement with a repeated ostinato-like statement (Ex. 3.15).

Example 3.15. Recurring statement, mvt. III, mm. 4-5.



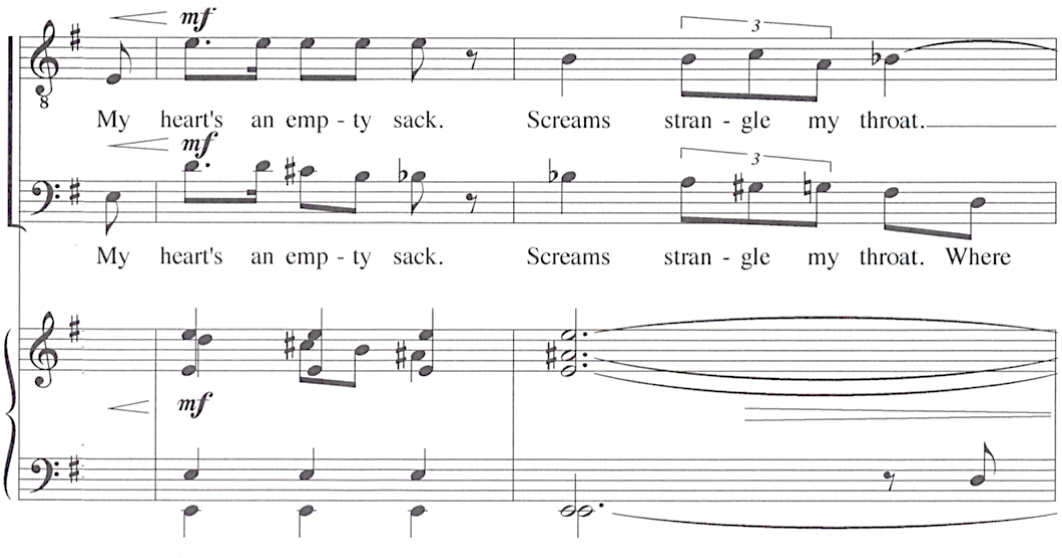
The two-measure statement is made up of two descending whole steps connected by an ascending half step, creating a deeply somber setting of the words, "Absalom, my son." Written dynamics indicate that a swell and release be employed each time the phrase is sung. Between the first few occurrences of the statement, the cellos interject with melodic intervals, first a minor ninth, then a major seventh, followed by a short melody that ends on a minor seventh. Each of these intervals will reappear in the movement.

127. The OKC bombing was at 9:02 a.m., and today, large gates frame the memorial site with time stamps of the moments before and after: 9:01 and 9:03. However, according to Cobb's March 2025 interview with the author, her use of three chimes here is a coincidental rather than intentional reference to 9:03 a.m.

Measures 12-20: "Grief seals my soul in concrete"

This is the singular instance in *Threnody* when Latin liturgical text and lines from "Through a Glass Darkly" are truly juxtaposed. Treble voices and clarinet continue their funereal repetition of "Absalom, fili mi" while tenors and basses enter singing English words, enhanced by the sonority of trombones. The second phrase starts on the tonic (E) on the downbeat of m. 14 and then quickly reaches its peak tone of D-natural on the downbeat of m. 15, highlighting the interval of a minor seventh. The third and fourth phrases, mm. 17-18, display Cobb's use of dissonance in text painting. The basses sing an ascending minor seventh, creating discord against the tonic and illustrating the pain of a broken "heart." Harmonic conflict increases from there as "screams" is intensified by a minor second in the tenor and bass voices and by a tritone in the orchestra. Dissonant intervals continue in the vocal lines through the word "strangle" (Ex. 3.16).

Example 3.16. Dissonant text painting, mvt. III, mm. 17-18 (reduction).

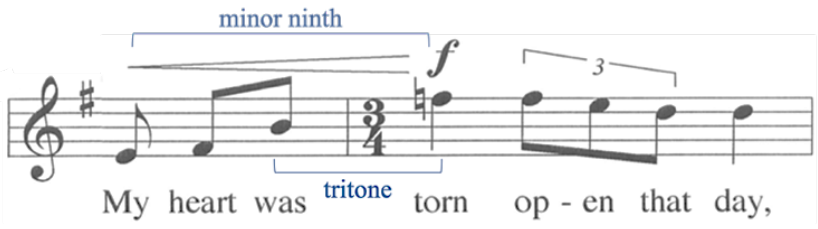


The section ends with tenor and bass voices singing "Where are you, God? Where are you now?" creating a repeated minor seventh on downbeats against the pedal tone. Treble voices simultaneously intone one final "Absalom, my son."

Measures 21-27: "My heart was torn open that day"

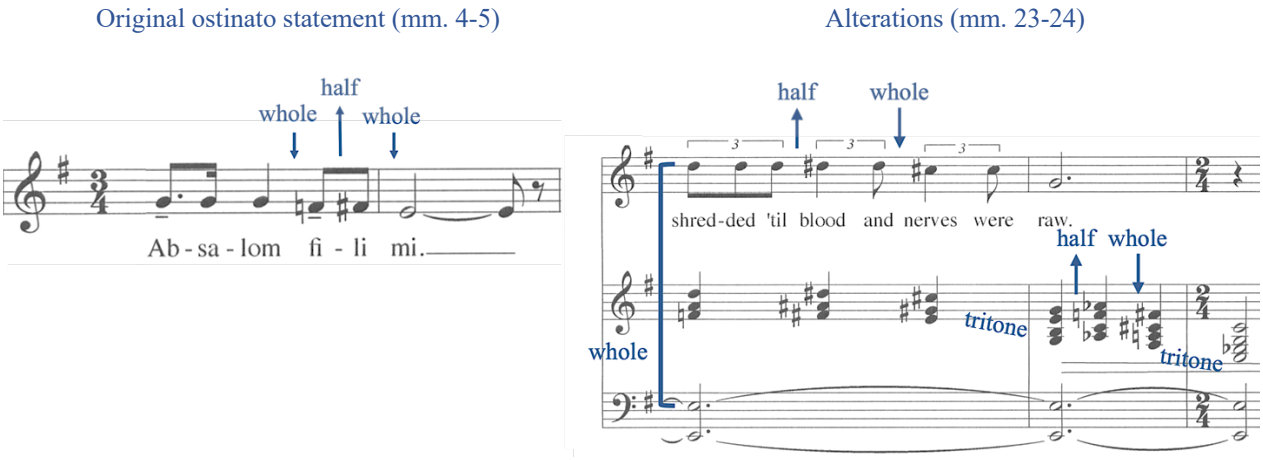
At this point, the voices and French horns join together in unison, and their opening line spans the interval of a minor ninth, approached by a tritone to land on F-natural at the word "torn" (Ex. 3.17).

Example 3.17. Dissonant intervals in melodic line, mvt. III, mm. 21-22.



An E pedal tone in the low strings continues to undergird the movement. As voices sing "shredded 'til blood and nerves were raw," we hear the "fili mi" ("my son") portion of the ostinato statement transposed up a major sixth. The E pedal tone, a whole step lower than the first note of the melody, could be considered the first pitch of the transposed statement, undergirding the melody with an insistent mourning of "Absalom." The lament of grief is insistent, carrying on into m. 24 as the orchestra continues the "fili mi" pattern in parallel triadic chords connected to the preceding and following measures by the interval of a tritone (Ex. 3.18).

Example 3.18. Original statement and alterations, mvt. III, mm. 23-25 (reduction).
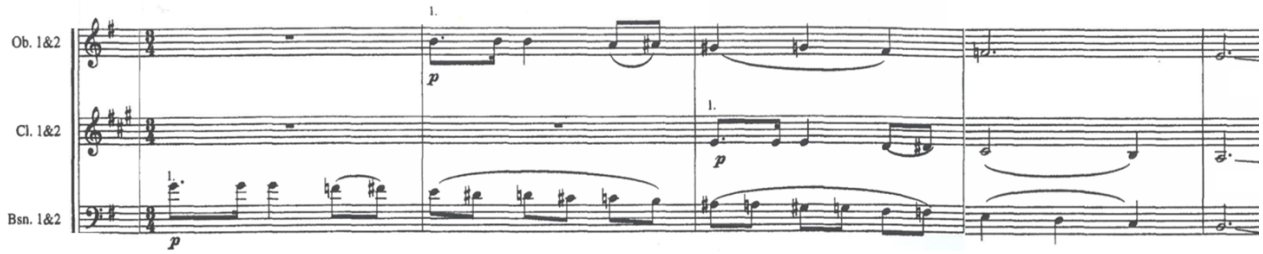


The final phrase of the section, beginning in m. 26, alternates between C minor and D minor chords over the E pedal tone before returning home to E minor at m. 28.

Measures 28-39: "Absalom, fili mi, quis mihi tribuat ut ego moriar pro te"
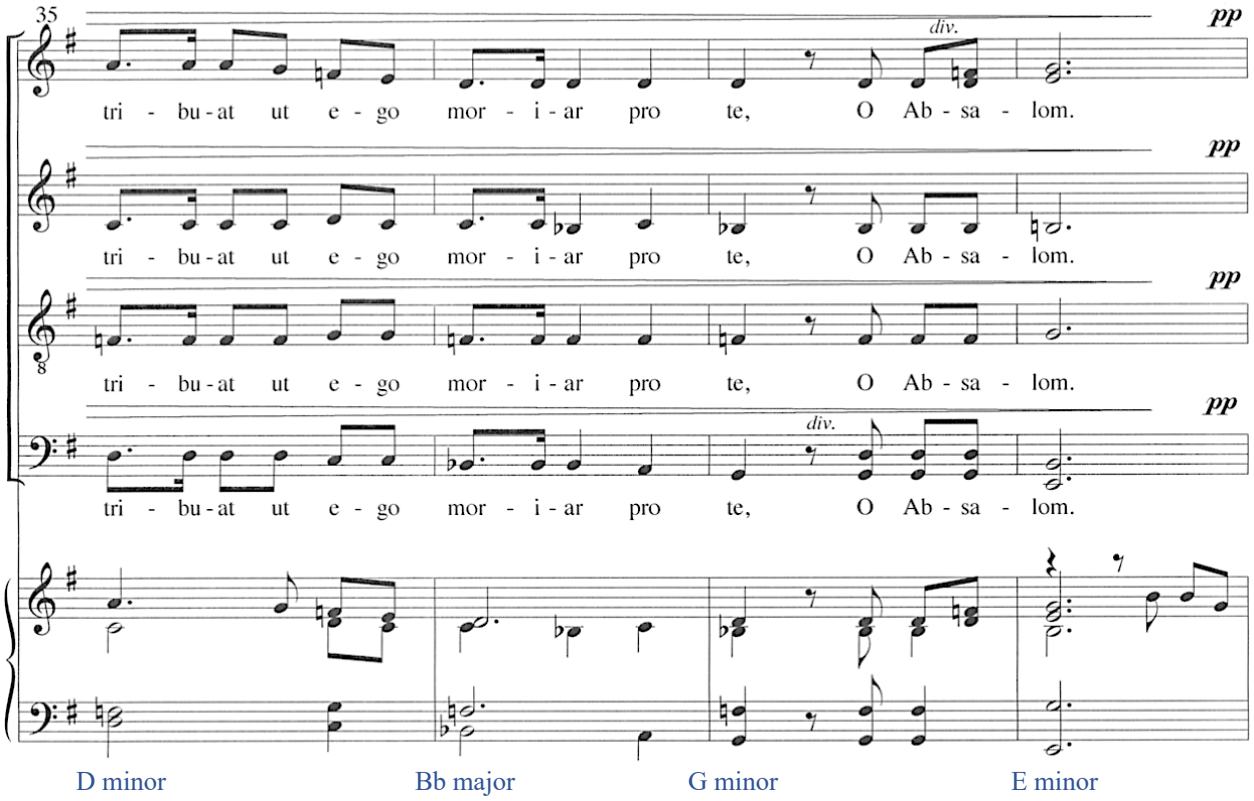
The "Absalom, fili mi" statement returns here in a contrapuntal woodwind trio of bassoon, oboe, and clarinet. This grief-stricken dissonant counterpoint begins in E minor with each entrance offset by a third. Each instrument plays the six-note statement and then descends, mostly by semitones, their downward chromaticism communicating utter despondence (Ex. 3.19).

Example 3.19. Dissonant woodwind counterpoint using opening statement, mvt. III, mm. 28-32.



When the voices enter, they sing “Absalom, fili mi” in four-part harmony for the first time, enhanced by string doubling. The phrase crescendos to reach the first and only utterance of “quis mihi tribuat ut ego moriar pro te,” meaning “would that I could have died for you.” Through this devastating sentiment, the dynamics gradually decay. The harmonization descends as well, each downbeat chord dropping by the interval of a third (Ex. 3.20).

Example 3.20. Descending third relationships, mvt. III, mm. 35-38 (reduction).



Another haunting clarinet melody, also descending, then leads back into the poetry of Clark.

Measures 40-47: "Take me to a world where terror's unknown"

The musical return to Clark's poetry features meter changes that enhance natural syllabic emphasis and promote intelligibility. The opening tenor-bass phrase, in 5/4 and then 3/4, sees a major seventh between voices on the word "world," followed by contrary motion that lands in A-flat major. Unison treble voices enter in m. 43, undergirded by tonal instability. The unfolding gesture commences in m. 45, followed by contrary motion that gently cadences at the word "peace" on an A-major chord, with a major seventh adding a touch of dissonant color.

Measures 48-57: "Absalom, fili mi"

The movement ends with a return to the opening statement, first played in imitation by the violas and second violins over a repeated A in the contrabass and cello. The bass, tenor divisi, and alto voices finish the movement with iterations of the "Absalom, fili mi" statement in six measures of four-part chromatic counterpoint. Their desolate descent recalls the ending of the Crucifixus from Bach's Mass in B Minor, a musical portrait of death and burial. Following nine measures of chromaticism and obscured tonality, voices end the movement on a simple, stable, low E minor chord.

Movement IV. Ubi Caritas

...Remember us, send your comfort down through memory's endless space.
Cover our hearts with reassurance.
Give us your balm of protection and love.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.	*Where there is charity and love, God is there.*
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.	*The love of Christ has gathered us together.*
Exsultemus et in ipso jucundemur.	*Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*
Timeamus et amemus Deum vivum.	*Let us revere and love the living God.*
Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.	*And from a sincere heart let us love one another.*

Following the expressions of deep grief in the third movement, "Ubi Caritas" conveys the significant role of community in the difficult work of processing and healing. Cobb remembers Clark speaking about the healing love that took place when survivors joined together: "Ernestine talked to me quite a bit about being in this group where people leaned on each other together. Together is how they healed."[128] The fourth movement is about community and about the ongoing quest for peace following a heartbreaking loss.

These ideas are expressed musically through the simplicity of minimalism and the calmness of gentle rocking gestures. For the first time in the work, major tonalities are used, lending a bit of brightness to the musical narrative of togetherness. Added tones create cluster chords that further illustrate the closeness of community and they, along with the lack of harmonic motion, contribute to the minimalist quality of this movement. The form of "Ubi Caritas" also lends an air of reassurance. It is the only movement in which introductory material returns, bringing with it a sense of stability.

"Ubi Caritas" is structured in four parts. The opening nine bars are a prequel, setting up the rest of the movement. The A section then begins in m. 10 and continues for eighteen bars.

128. Cobb, interview, Mar 2025.

The B section follows in m. 29 with new material. In m. 41, the A material returns, though altered with new material in its latter half. This final section is labelled A'. Table 4 shows the structure of the fourth movement.

Table 4: Structure of "Ubi Caritas" (mvt. IV)

Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
Prequel	mm. 1-9 (9 bars)	Clark Poetry	Remember us…	G major (pentatonic)	Freely quarter = 60 3/4, 4/4	none
A	mm. 10-28 (19 bars)	Liturgical	Ubi caritas et amor…	F major	dotted quarter = 66 6/8	woodwinds horn piano strings
B	mm. 29-40 (12 bars)	Liturgical	Exultemus et in ipso…	B major		brass (no horns) glockenspiel piano strings
A'	mm. 41-62 (22 bars)	Liturgical	Et ex corde diligamus…	F major		woodwinds horns low brass piano strings

Measures 1-9: Prequel

The first section of the fourth movement serves as a prequel. With text by Clark, the first nine measures are sung by unaccompanied voices. In spite of the C in m. 4, the opening section sounds like G major pentatonic. As the text asks for "comfort" and "reassurance," the soothing pentatonic scale, with its lack of dissonance, is stable and secure.

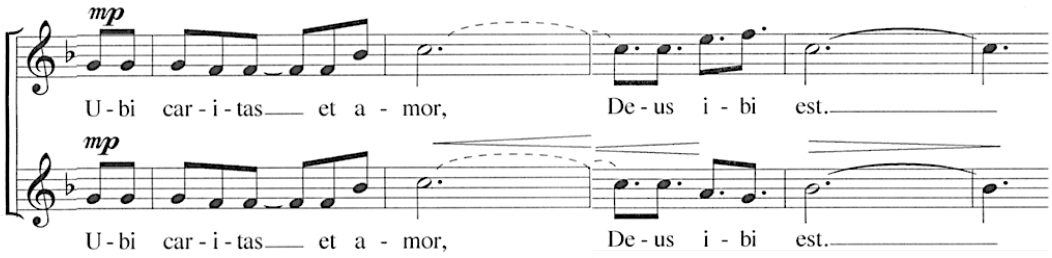
This section could also be perceived as being still in E minor, but the first and most often occurring pitch is G. Additionally, the highest and lowest pitches are both D, the dominant of G.

The only accompaniment in the first nine bars is an occasional chime, also on G, recalling previous movements of the piece. The opening melody ends on A, and this second scale degree serves as a pivot tone to F major.

Measures 10-28: A

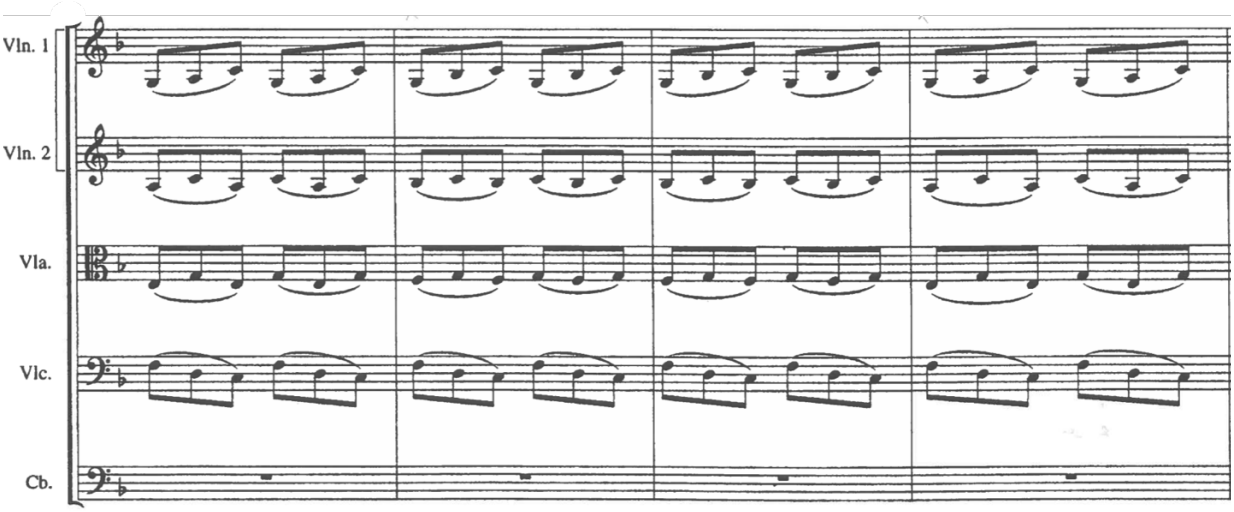
The next section is in a lilting 6/8 meter and settles into the first major tonality of *Threnody* thus far. It is a quest for lightness and reassurance amidst the crushing loneliness of grief. While clearly in F major, added tones are immediately present, most obviously the second. Voices enter on this pitch in unison and then quickly unfold (Ex. 3.21).

Example 3.21. Unison voices leading to unfolding gesture, mvt. IV, mm. 16-20.



Repeated rocking patterns in the strings give “Ubi Caritas” a sense of lulling movement and quiet soothing. The outer strings move in contrary motion, each spanning the interval of a fourth with a second inside, while the inner strings rock back and forth in parallel fourths. These patterns, which showcase added tones and allude to minimalism, continue for most of the piece (Example 3.22).

Example 3.22. String patterns, mvt. IV, mm. 18-21.



Long tones by the woodwinds enhance the timbre. Horn and oboe begin an augmented variation of the vocal melody in measure 16, and it, with assistance from other woodwinds and strings, moves by stepwise motion into the new key.

This modulation to B major occurs without a single accidental in the score, and excitement builds through text that translates to "The love of Christ has gathered us together." Treble voices lead into the key change with Cobb's characteristic melodic voice leading. They unfold from D by semitones in contrary motion to arrive at the third of the new B-major tonality (D-sharp) and the added ninth (C-sharp), which is a feature of this movement.

Measures 29-40: B

Still in 6/8, this section introduces new material in the key of B major. The translated text is "Let us rejoice and be glad in it," and this exuberance is communicated by the entrance of trumpets and trombones, the higher registration of voices, and the return of the glockenspiel. The

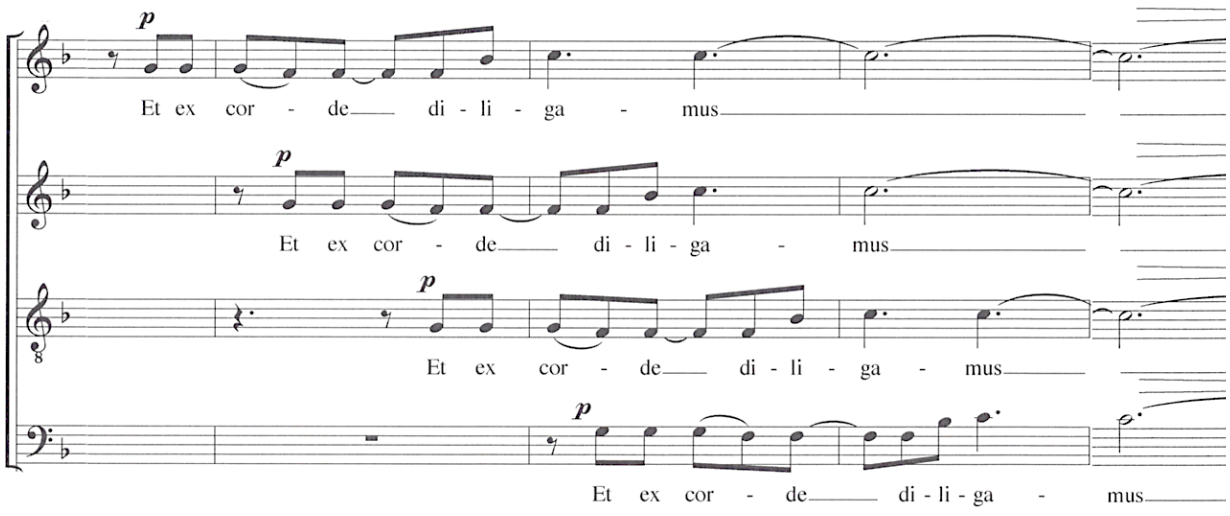
harmonic language then changes beginning in m. 33, moving through chromaticism that obscures the tonality and culminates in a sustained C-minor chord with characteristic added tones.

Measures 41-62: A'

The final section of the movement begins with a return of the initial 6/8 melody, this time using the "Et ex corde diligamus" text with cluster chords in the woodwinds, horns, and low brass. The oboe shimmers over the orchestral texture, restating the augmented version of the melody from m. 16.

Ten bars later, in m. 50, the opening melody is sung in each part by imitation, each voice contributing to the initiation of the final phrase, "Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero," meaning, "and from a sincere heart let us love one another" (Ex. 3.23).

Example 3.23. Imitation in voice parts, mvt. IV, mm. 50-53.



Following their individual statements, the voices come together in unison and then sing their final line unaccompanied. As they sustain the last pitch, strings and piano enter with the gentle rocking pattern, gradually slow, and then settle on an F-based cluster chord. This final sonority is

lightly punctuated by the sunny glockenspiel. The musical message is conveyed: togetherness fosters restorative peace.

Movement V: Interlude

From the dull, gray bark, a tiny bud emerges.
Raises its fragile head, then slowly lifts green tendrils,
turns to the sun.

Softly, swiftly through the deep night,
Soundless waves of thought approach.
Through starry skies, from velvet clouds,
an inward breath, a wave of whispers.

Arise and see through lightfilled eyes, your broken wings are mended.
Arise, your parched throat will soon be filled with song and light.
You'll thirst no more.
Love has healed your silent mind.
Arise my soul, sing a new song.

Threnody's fifth movement is an interlude connecting the onset of healing through community in "Ubi Caritas" with the joyful outlook that lies ahead in "Cantate Domino." The message of "Interlude" is hope—the idea that, despite the debilitating pain of grief, one can, with the help and support of others, dare to hope for a brighter tomorrow. Out of death and darkness, life and light can grow. Survivors can "arise" and "sing a new song."

A fundamental feature of "Interlude" is musical setting for textual intelligibility. The words are of primary importance. This is achieved through unison melodies, absent or minimal orchestration, and rhythmic alignment of voices. When instruments are utilized, the orchestration creates expressive textures that enhance the text. Cobb's unfolding gesture portrays budding and growth, and cluster chords and simplicity are subtle nods to minimalism, carried over from the fourth movement.

"Interlude" has two large parts, each twelve measures long. Afterward, two measures of instrumental music segue into the final movement. Further information regarding the simple structure of "Interlude" is available in Table 5.

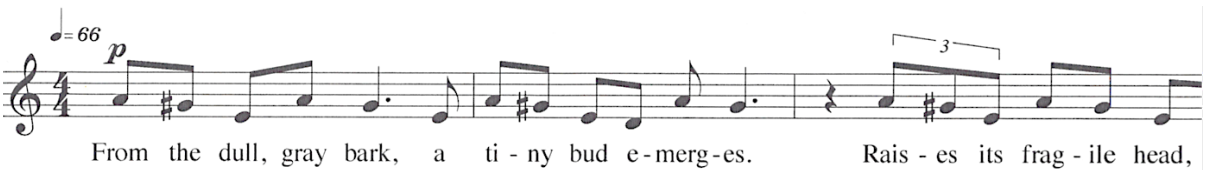
Table 5: Structure of "Interlude" (mvt. V)

Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
1	mm. 1-12 (12 bars)	Clark Poetry	From the dull gray bark a tiny bud emerges…	A minor	quarter = 66 4/4, 3/4	clarinet horn strings
2	mm. 13-24 (12 bars)	Clark Poetry	Arise and see through lightfilled eyes…	transitional	4/4, 6/4	woodwinds strings
Instrumental Segue	mm. 25-26 (2 bars)	(none)	(none)	Eb major	quarter = 144 4/4	flute clarinet (strings)

Measures 1-12: "From the dull gray bark a tiny bud emerges"

This transitional movement about hope and rebirth opens with unison treble voices doubled by clarinet. A simple melody built around the tonic, leading tone, and fifth tonicizes A (Ex. 3.24).

Example 3.24. Opening melody in unison treble voices and clarinet, mvt. V, mm. 1-3.



This presence of the leading tone is highly unusual in Cobb's music and perhaps indicates the significance of this movement's message of hopeful possibility. It is not clear until the fifth measure, when the C-natural first appears, that the tonality is minor. The text here is the word "sun," which is brightened by glockenspiel on the same pitch.

The next portion of the melody is sung by unison tenor and bass voices. The doubling instrument changes from clarinet to horn, and the soothing texture is enriched by whole-note chords in the strings. This velvety orchestration, paired with low voices, creates a musical image of "the deep night."

At m. 8, all voices join together in harmony to sing the phrase that begins "Through starry skies." Cobb's characteristic unfolding gesture recurs to see the vocal harmony blossom into a six-part chord. Accidentals appear as the voices unfold, and the first section of "Interlude" cadences on D-flat in m. 11, colored by a seventh.

Measures 13-24: "Arise and see through lightfilled eyes"

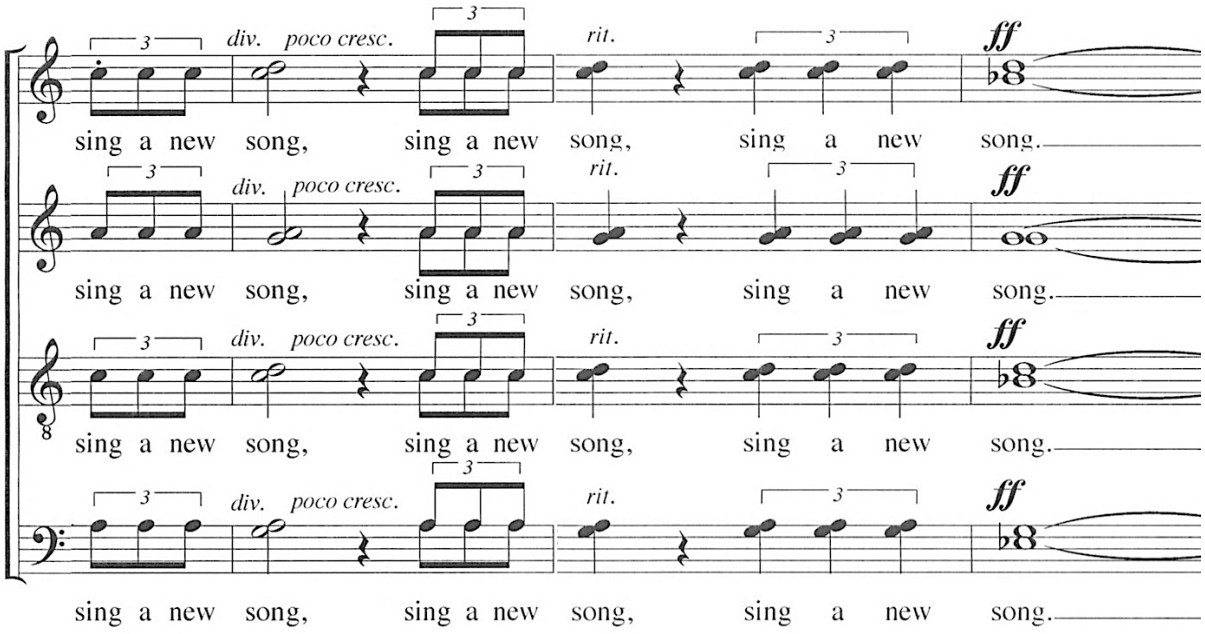
The theme of hopefulness continues into the second half of "Interlude" as high woodwinds enter, enhancing soprano voices for the first "Arise" of the movement. Then, as in the first section, tenors and basses take a turn with the unison melody. Treble singers repeat "Arise," and all voices join to sing "you'll thirst no more" in luscious cluster chords that see most pitches rising by a semitone into m. 18. This lift indicates the spiritual revitalization anticipated by the text and sets up a high point of the entire work.

"Love has healed your silent mind," is sung by all voices in unison in m. 19. The melody utilizes the tonic, leading tone, and fifth as in the movement's opening, but it is now in a new, third-related higher key. All rhythmic motion in the orchestra stops. Only sustained chords in the

strings support these all-important words, clarified by the unison setting and lack of instrumental movement.

Three statements of "sing a new song" follow, heralding the final movement's "Cantate Domino canticum novum," which means "Sing to the Lord a new song." Voices are now in harmony while singing the same rhythm. This rhythmic alignment supports continued intelligibility and highlights the significant textual repetition (Ex. 3.25).

Example 3.25. Rhythmic alignment supporting intelligibility of text, mvt. V, mm. 22-24.

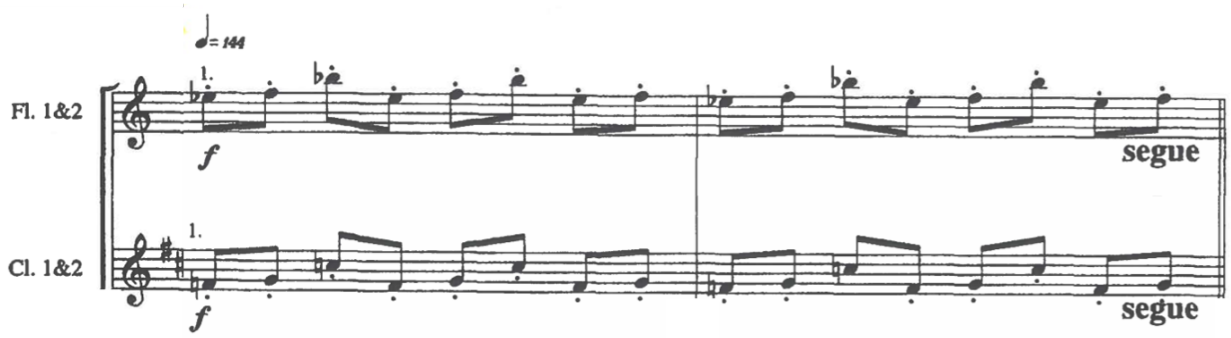


Volume increases and excitement builds as cluster chords expand through careful voice leading to arrive at an E-flat major chord decorated with a seventh, setting up the new key of the final movement.

Measures 25-26: Instrumental Segue

As the choir sustains their final chord, flute and clarinet enter in E-flat major to segue into the sixth and final movement. Their new tempo is bright and happy, and the staccato eighth-note pattern intimates a lighthearted joyfulness. This pattern both sets up and then continues into the next movement (Ex. 3.26).

Example 3.26. Flute and clarinet parts, mvt. V, mm. 25-26.



Movement VI: Cantate Domino

Cantate Domino canticum novum,	*Sing to the Lord a new song,*
Cantate Domino omnis terra.	*Sing to the Lord all the earth.*
Cantate Domino, et benedicite nomini ejus.	*Sing to the Lord, and bless his name.*
Annuntiate de die in diem salutare ejus.	*Proclaim his salvation from day to day.*
Annuntiate inter gentes gloriam ejus,	*Declare his glory among the nations,*
In omnibus populis mirabilia ejus.	*His wonders among all people.*
Quoniam magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis.	*For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised.*
Quoniam magnus Dominus terribilis est super omnes deos. Amen.	*For the Lord is great. He is to be feared above all gods. Amen.*

The final movement of *Threnody* opens with cautious optimism and builds to utter exuberance. It is the last stage of Clark's grief narrative, as those suffering discover resurgence

and renewal. Cobb selected the text to show the ability of humankind to move through traumatic experiences and find moments of gladness. It is perhaps an unexpected happy ending to a difficult story, but this was the experience of Ernestine Clark, and it is the way she wrote "Through a Glass Darkly." Her writing illustrates the journey of grief: experiencing the depths of despair, finding glimmers of hope, and learning to live again as a new person whose "broken wings are mended."[129] This is the narrative of *Threnody* as well, culminating in the joyful "Cantate Domino."

In this movement, joyfulness is communicated through major keys, exciting rhythmic structures, metric shifts, changing dynamics, and expressive orchestration. Cobb's third-related keys are present as is her signature lowered seventh. Tonality changes are created through linear voice leading, and the unfolding gesture lends excitement to both instrumental and vocal writing.

This analysis considers "Cantate Domino" in four parts. The first is an intricate fugue involving all four voices. The second is in a rhythmic 7/8, and the third is a significant shift into a much slower Maestoso section. Tempo 1 returns for section four, borrowing from the first two sections and introducing new material as well. Table 6 shows the structure of "Cantate Domino." It is an intricate, complete movement that could easily be extracted from *Threnody* to stand alone in a concert setting.

129. *Threnody*, 3.

Table 6: Structure of "Cantate Domino" (mvt. VI)

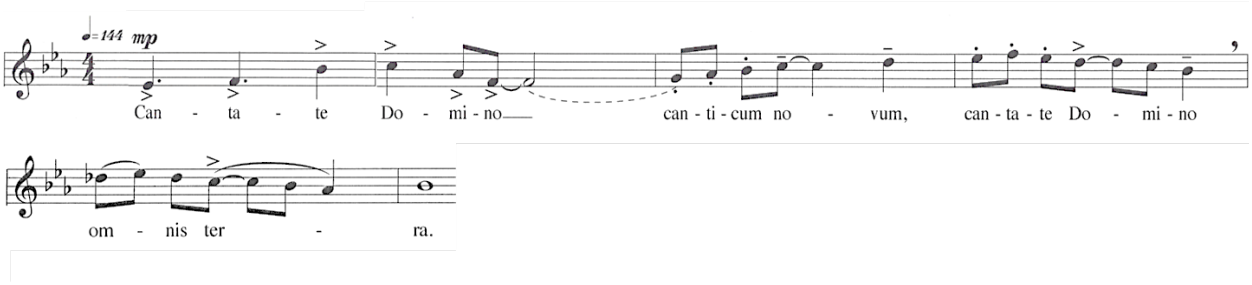
Section	Measures	Text Source	First Line	Tonality	Tempo and Meter	Orchestration
Fugal	mm. 1-26 (26 bars)	Liturgical	Cantate Domino canticum novum…	Eb major	quarter = 144 4/4	woodwinds horns trumpets percussion piano strings
7/8	mm. 27-50 (24 bars)	Liturgical	Cantate Domino et benedicite nomini ejus…	Db major	7/8, 3/8, (4/4)	full orchestra
Maestoso	mm. 51-61 (11 bars)	Liturgical	Quoniam magnus Dominus…	Bb major	Maestoso quarter = 80 4/4	full orchestra
Tempo I	mm. 62-103 (42 bars)	Liturgical	Cantate Domino canticum novum…	D major	Tempo I 4/4, mixed meter	full orchestra

Measures 1-26: Fugal

The staccato flute-clarinet ostinato continues from the previous movement to open the final movement at pianissimo. It is joined by soft syncopated rhythms in the strings and timpani, and the combined instruments portray a light joyfulness that, while not yet assured, is quietly coming into view. A bouncy pattern of an octave, an interval that will recur later in the movement, is established by the cello.

Voices enter in m. 3 to initiate an intricate fugue. The syncopated five-measure subject is passed by imitation from soprano to alto to tenor to bass, and clear articulation markings highlight the rhythmic text setting (Ex. 3.27).
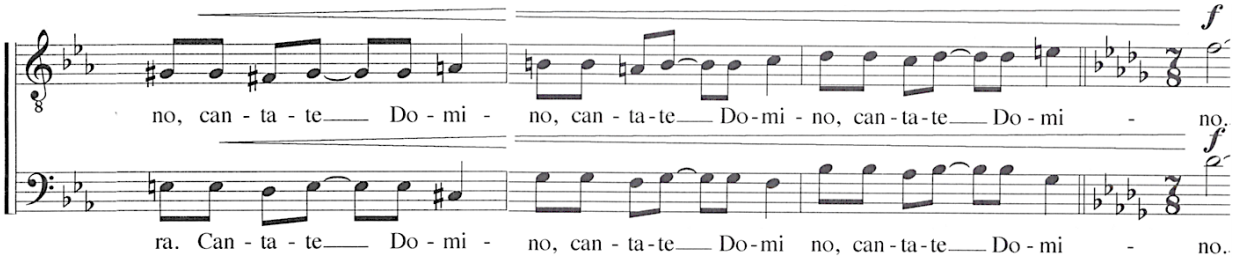
Example 3.27. Fugue subject, mvt. VI, mm. 3-8.



The dynamic level increases with each statement of the fugue, building excitement as each voice enters. Additionally, the four statements of the subject are doubled consecutively by horn, trumpet, flute, and double reeds, creating new timbres every five measures.

Cobb's lowered seventh first appears in m. 7 and recurs throughout the fugue, giving it a Mixolydian flair. As the bass voice completes the final statement of the theme, the fugue gives way to a tenor-bass duet sequence that moves the tonality to D-flat major. This transition is seen in Example 3.28.

Example 3.28. Modulatory sequence in tenor and bass voices, mvt. VI, mm. 24-27.
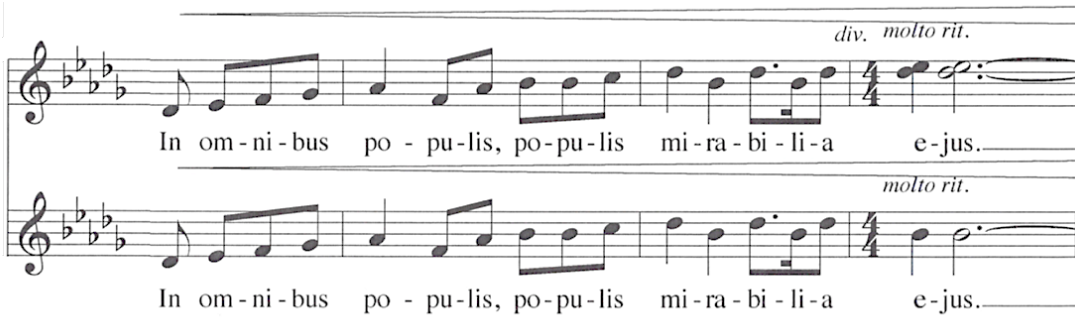


Measures 27-50: 7/8

The dance-like 7/8 section begins in m. 27 with an eighth-note pattern established by several low instruments while the flutes initiate a florid arc-shaped melody of their own. Toms

and triangle complete the timbre of the rhythmic new meter. Over two measures, instruments decrescendo from forte to piano, setting up another quietly enthusiastic vocal entrance.

The vocal writing in the 7/8 section is a series of duets over continuing rhythmic intricacy in the orchestra. Treble voices enter at m. 29 in a duet of parallel thirds and are immediately echoed by tenor and bass voices with the same material. At m. 36, the treble voices, still harmonizing in thirds, begin the first build of the section with "Annunciate de die," and accidentals raise pitches to result in a G Mixolydian sound. Transitional statements of "Cantate Domino," first in low voices, then in high, lead to the tenor-bass statement of the "Annunciate" material in m. 43, a step lower than the treble voices were in m. 36. At m. 46, treble voices enter in D-flat major before transitioning, through melodic voice leading, to B-flat minor (Ex. 3.29), setting up the subsequent arrival of B-flat major.

Example 3.29. Treble voice leading from D-flat major to B-flat minor, mvt. VI, mm. 46-49.

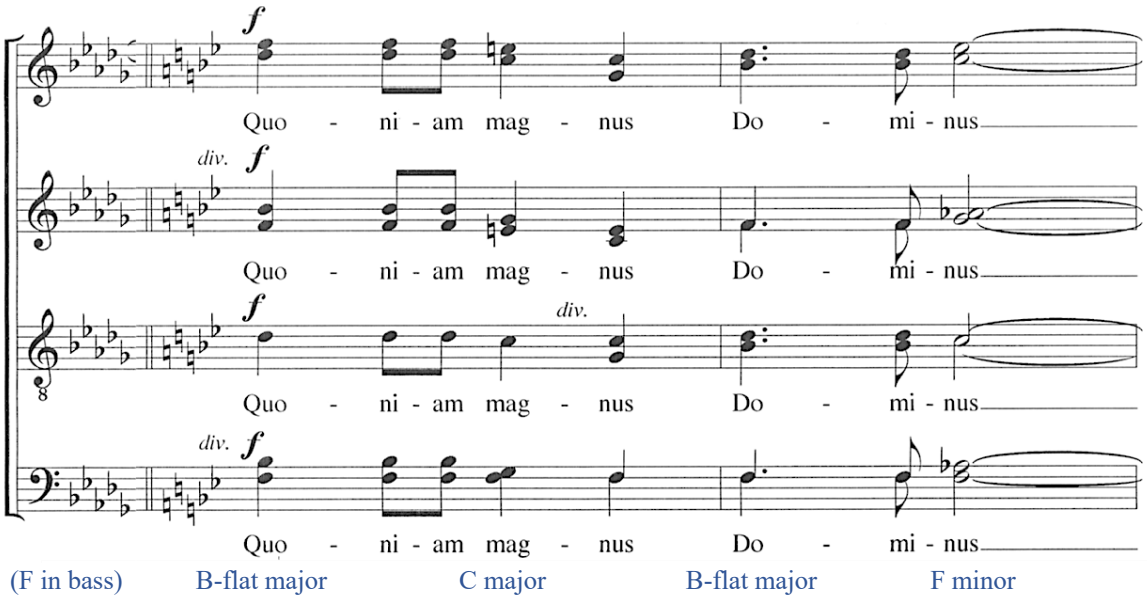


In m. 49, a meter change to 4/4 occurs. For two measures, a descending line is heard in the low instruments, moving downward from B-flat in stepwise motion to arrive at F, the dominant of the new key. The rhythmic motion of this bass line drives the *molto ritardando*, setting up the Maestoso section to come.

Measures 51-61: Maestoso
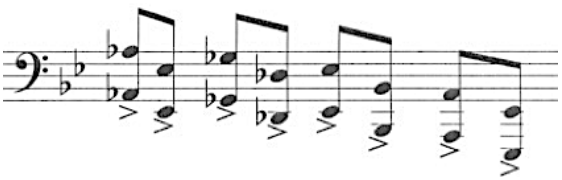
The majestic third section of the final movement begins in the new tonality of B-flat major, a third-related key. However, rather than being in root position, the first chord is a I 6/4, implying that there is yet more to come. Anticipation is instigated by this second inversion chord and heightened as the F is repeated in the bass (Ex. 3.30).

Example 3.30. Chord progression in B-flat major, mvt. VI, mm. 51-52.
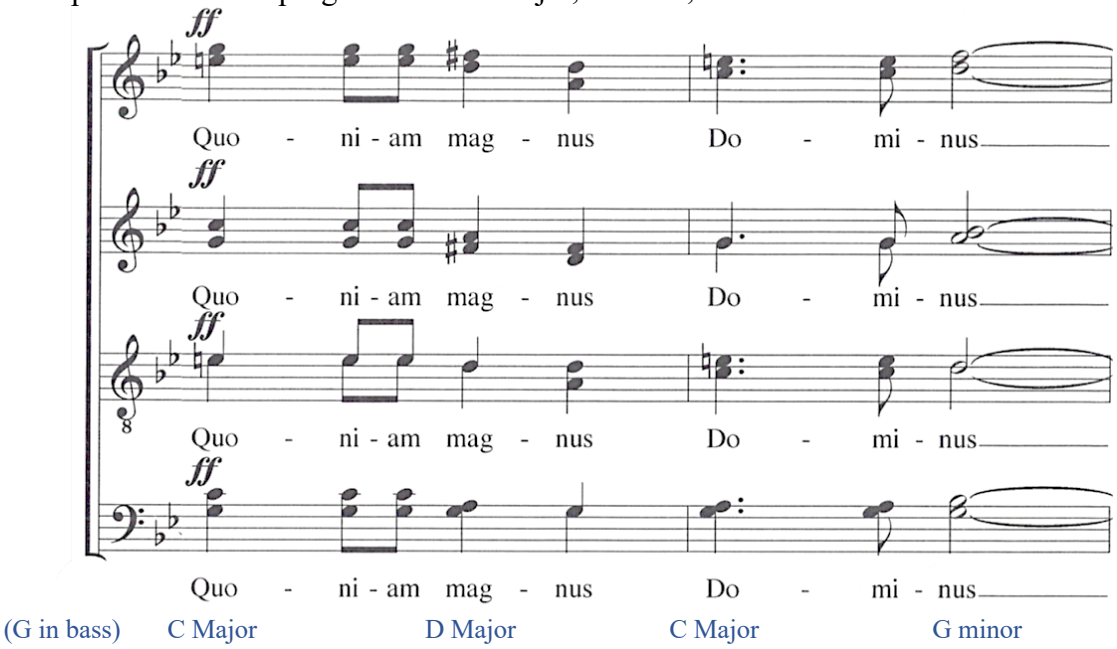


This harmonic language is repeated in mm. 54-55 with the text "et laudabilis nimis," introduced by a bass line of descending fourths (Ex. 3.31).

Example 3.31 Descending fourths in bass line, mvt. VI, m. 53 (reduction).



In m. 56, this bass line reappears with a change on beat four, leading to the dominant of C major and the same material as mm. 51-52, this time one step higher and one dynamic level louder (Ex. 3.32).

Example 3.32. Chord progression in C major, mvt. VI, mm. 57-58.



A second C-major statement beginning in m. 60 changes slightly at the end, with ascending melodic vocal lines leading into D major. Therefore, the escalating tonal succession through this exciting Maestoso section is increasing whole steps, from B-flat to C to D. The full orchestra is engaged for the duration of the segment, and vibrant sixteenth-note scales in the violins, piano, and woodwinds compound its dramatic flair.

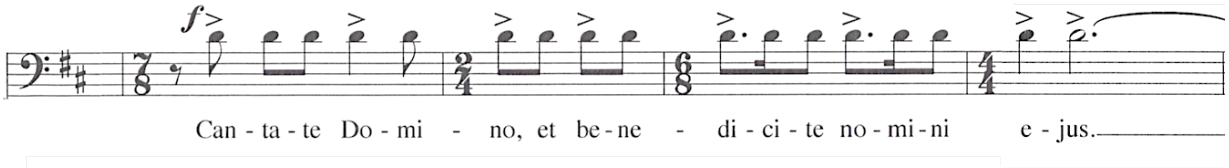
Measures 62-103: Tempo I

The last section of *Threnody*'s final movement combines elements from previous sections, weaving them together in a fortissimo finish. The octave ostinato established by the

xylophone, piano, and upper strings in m. 62 hearkens back to the octaves in the cello at the beginning of the movement. Repetition of the D tonic persists all the way through m. 87 in a variety of rhythmic patterns and instruments.
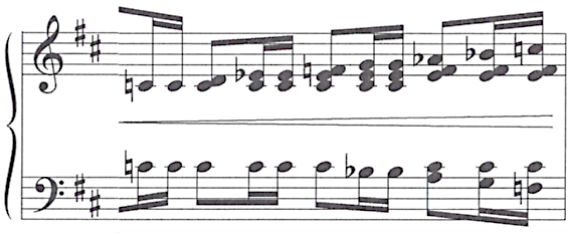
The fugue subject from section one returns in m. 68. This time, however, it is sung in unison by altos and basses while sopranos and tenors repeat the tonic pitch in the same syncopated rhythm. Irregular meters return in m. 75, recalling the 7/8 of section two. The melodic rhythm of mm. 77-78 begins with the same 7/8 rhythms as mm. 29-30. This time though, the meter shifts as does the rhythm, lending a surprising freshness to the repeated text (Ex. 3.33).

Example 3.33. Rhythmic intricacy shown on D pedal tone, mvt. VI, mm. 77-80.

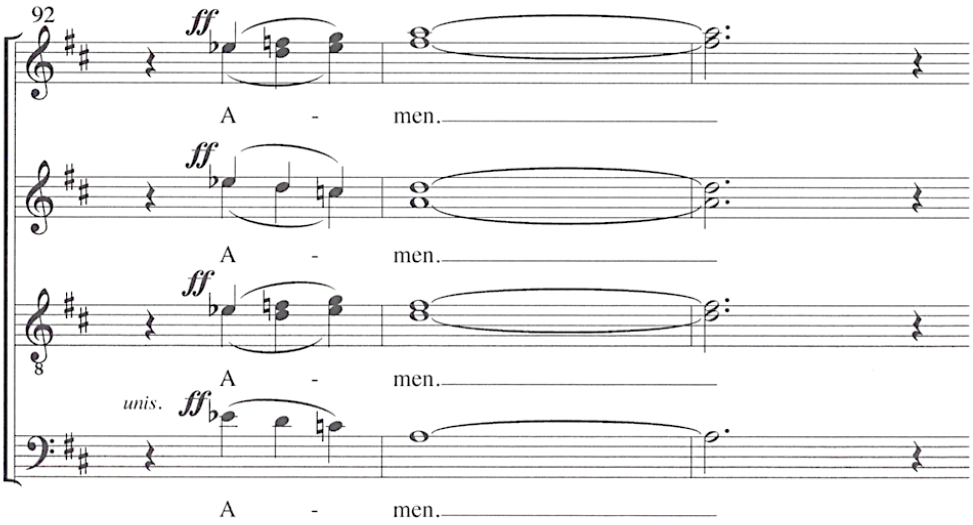


To set up the final "amen" series of the work, a brass fanfare unfolds from C (Ex. 3.34). This is immediately followed by unaccompanied voices unfolding from E-flat to sing the first "Amen" (Ex 3.35). In both cases, the build from a unison pitch outward to multi-voiced harmony adds burgeoning energy to an already heightened final movement.

Example 3.34. Unfolding brass fanfare, mvt VI, m. 91 (reduction).



Example 3.35. Unfolding voices for first “Amen,” mvt. VI, mm. 92-93.



A meter change to 5/8 includes three restatements of “Amen” by SATB voices in parallel triadic harmony over a D pedal tone, and Cobb’s traditional lowered seventh is present in each of them. The final “Amen” is the longest, expanded to half notes in 4/4 time. Unaccompanied voices begin on D major and move through E-flat and A-flat major chords in ascending stepwise motion to arrive at the final sparkling D-major sonority, topped by a D6 in the soprano voice. “Cantate Domino” ends with a unison rhythmic orchestral flourish, emphasizing dominant and tonic pitches and celebrating the hard-won arrival of the “soul singing a new song.”[130]

130. *Threnody*, 3.

Premiere, Response, and Other Performances

Threnody did not win the Michael Hennagin prize, but hearing from someone "in the know" that it was a close second encouraged Cobb to submit it to ASCAP's annual Rudolph Nissim Orchestral Competition.[131] There, it was selected for a special distinction award in January of 1999, still never having been performed. That award was the impetus for Cobb to contact Debra Spurgeon, then president-elect of the southwestern division of the American Choral Directors Association, who became instrumental in coordinating the premiere of *Threnody*. The year 2000 was chosen because it was the fifth anniversary of the bombing. *Threnody* was performed on March 17 and 18 in Oklahoma City as part of the American Choral Directors Association's Southwest Division Convention.[132]

The groups contracted for the premiere performance were Canterbury Choral Society and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. After hearing Canterbury in rehearsal for the performance, Cobb said, "I am so grateful we have such a stellar group to perform this. It intensifies the effort considerably. Most of the people in the group knew someone or knew of someone who was involved in the bombing. It changed their lives."[133] Some performers struggled with the intensity of the text. Denise Haury, who sang alto in the first performance, remembers, "It was pretty raw, because it was real for us."[134] Several members of her section had been directly affected by the attack. At least one of them chose not to sing the piece because it was just too difficult.

Rick Rogers of *The Oklahoman* was in the audience for the premiere. He praised *Threnody*'s "contemporary yet accessible style, noted for some spectacular sonorities and

131. Cobb, interview, Mar 2025.
132. R. Paul Drummond, "Southwestern Division: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma March 15-18, 2000," *Choral Journal* 40, no. 6 (2000): 137–141.
133. Rogers, "A musical healing."
134. Denise Haury, interview by author, April 5, 2025.

textures."[135] He concluded, "Given its impressive construction and fine reception, *Threnody for an April Day* should become a repertory staple."[136] Perhaps the highest praise though came from Ernestine Clark herself:

> When I first heard the finished composition, I wept. The music expressed perfectly the full range of emotion that I had experienced. There's an ageless wisdom within her music, but also a compelling urgency that reflects this decade, this century's experiences. Whatever portion of it speaks to each listener, each performer, it's enough for me to know a connection has been made.[137]

Threnody for an April Day was premiered in March of 2000. In September of 2001, foreign terrorists attacked the United States, using planes as weapons to destroy the World Trade Center towers in downtown New York City. Cobb remembers watching news coverage of survivors there who recounted the incomprehensible sight of what looked like diamond rain falling from the sky. She was shocked at the parallels with Ernestine's poetry: "diamond shards of glass and horror splinter through the air." *Threnody* was published by Hinshaw three years later, in 2004.

Since its premiere, *Threnody* has received "critical acclaim and multiple performances."[138] It was sung by the Irving Chorale in Irving Texas under the direction of Artistic Director Harry Wooten, and by the Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers under the baton of Nancy Cobb. In 2018, *Threnody* was performed by the University of Northern Iowa combined choirs and orchestra with conductor John Wiles, and excerpted recordings of this performance are available on the composer's website.[139] Most recently, the author conducted an

135. Rick Rogers, "Threnody, requiem pairing unforgettable," The Oklahoman, March 22, 2000, https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2000/03/22/threnody-requiem-pairing-unforgettable/62206124007.
136. Rogers, "Threnody, requiem pairing unforgettable."
137. *Threnody*, 3.
138. Madeira, "We Come Here to Remember," 69.
139. "Threnody," Nancy Hill Cobb, accessed March 8, 2025, https://www.nancyhillcobb.com/works/threnody.

anniversary performance of the work in Oklahoma City on April 19, 2024 with the composer in attendance.

Universality and Importance of *Threnody*

The text of *Threnody* was born from the written expressions of an Oklahoma City bombing survivor, but the finished work, as Cobb intended, encompasses the commonality of grief to the human experience. Parallels between the stories of traumatic events are vast, from the Oklahoma City bombing to the 9/11 attacks in New York City, to mass shootings and other acts of violence across the country and around the globe. Grief also exists in the absence of violence, and the agonizing journey it instigates is universal. *Threnody* is not specific to one event or situation. Rather, it is for all those grieving, and its themes will resonate with anyone who has experienced loss.

Because of its musical prowess, its emotional impact, and its historical value, *Threnody* is deserving of a permanent place in the choral canon. Musically, the piece showcases a breadth of twentieth-century compositional devices that are used uniquely by this composer to enhance the powerful narrative. Aesthetically, it connects to performers and listeners alike, drawing on themes that are common to the human experience and conjuring emotional responses alongside artistic appreciation. *Threnody* is important for its historical content as well. With words written by a survivor of the first home-grown act of domestic terrorism in the United States, set to music by a composer who experienced the fallout, the firsthand accounts of this event and its aftermath are invaluable. Without question, *Threnody* is an important choral work, and its continued performance will benefit those who experience it for many years to come.

Conclusion

Nancy Hill Cobb's *Threnody* was performed for the first time on March 17, 2000. The premiere event was both celebratory and somber. Today, performers still remember the difficulty of singing words that so viscerally described the gruesome event that had devastated their Oklahoma community. A reviewer of the premiere performance was quick to note, though, that the work communicated more than a remembrance of the Oklahoma City terrorist attack. In response to the premiere, Rick Rogers of *The Oklahoman* wrote, "While the threnody is invariably linked to the bombing, it also transcends that horrific event to become an expression about the universality of grief."[140] *Threnody* is musically, historically, and emotionally significant. In addition to being highly artistic and derived from historical source documents, it also provides an experience through which anyone who has experienced loss can process the journey of grief.

On that day in March of 2000, Nancy Hill Cobb was also processing her ongoing experiences with gender bias. She now looks back on those workplace challenges as one of the most difficult times of her career. However, the experience gained through the struggles served her well as she became a university administrator and a passionate advocate for women's rights. Her experiences with bias, and her eventual departure from the religious environment that fostered it, also made a notable impact on her compositional output.

A significant shift in Cobb's musical writing took place in the late 1990s. As she began her journey away from the religious university where she had seen and experienced discrimination, her compositions also became less sacred and no longer geared toward church

140. Rogers, "Threnody, requiem pairing unforgettable."

choirs. *Threnody* is at the center of this transformation. Starting with *Threnody*, Cobb all but left behind church music composition in favor of secular pieces for a wider audience. Since that time, her music has been performed in schools, universities, contests, and festivals around the globe.

Connections

Connections to other areas of study can be made from the story of Nancy Hill Cobb and her *Threnody*. Two areas of association arise most significantly in this document: gender bias in music and music as a response to trauma. These subject areas cannot be discussed thoroughly within the scope of this document, but their relevance to this study calls for a mention here.

The story of Nancy Hill Cobb makes it evident that misogyny in music is a significant barrier for female composers and faculty members. In her 2021 DMA document, Christiane Gilbert finds that professors of music composition experience gender bias in relation to their academic efforts, and that female composers experience greater barriers to publishing than their male counterparts.[141] A 2023 *Neuron* article on inequity in academia asserts that gender bias has a substantial harmful impact on these women faculty members, negatively affecting both their careers and their well-being.[142] This was certainly the case for Nancy Hill Cobb. She overcame barriers of gender bias to achieve success in her own life and work, but the struggle against them permeated her career. Cobb is one of countless women in music who know firsthand the damage gender bias can cause.

141. Christiane Gilbert, DMA diss., 101-102.

142. Anaïs Llorens, Athina Tzovara, Ludovic Bellier, Ilina Bhaya-Grossman, Aurélie Bidet-Caulet, William K Chang, Zachariah R Cross, et al., "Gender Bias in Academia: A Lifetime Problem That Needs Solutions," *Neuron* (Cambridge, Mass.) 109, no. 13 (2021): 3.

Another area of study arising in this document is the functionality of music as a trauma response. *Threnody* was born out of a traumatic event. Its genesis shows a lay writer, Ernestine Clark, creating poetry out of desperation to process her experience. The music was written in response to the Oklahoma City bombing, following the loss of the composer's mother, with the intention of communicating the universality of grief. Humans have been using music as a response to trauma for decades. Maria Cizmic highlights this in her book *Performing Pain*, describing the powerful impulse people had in the 1940s to respond through music to the horrors of WWII and the Holocaust.[143] In "Music, Mourning, and Consolation," Alexander Stein agrees that music can play a significant role as a response to trauma and as a unique aesthetic expression of the range of emotions associated with grief.[144] *Threnody* communicates the universal journey of grief through music that conveys the story of a trauma survivor. Performers and listeners reap the benefits of emotional expression through music when they sing, play, and hear *Threnody*.

Final Thoughts

Cobb's story, much like the narrative of *Threnody*, shows how difficult experiences can lead to positive outcomes through effort, healing, and time. Traumatic events of loss—the Oklahoma City bombing and the death of Cobb's mother—became the impetus for the creation of Cobb's triumphant *Threnody*. Challenging experiences with gender bias led to her compositional shift, steering her toward the creation of music that could be performed in secular spaces, and allowing her music to become more widely known. The result is beneficial not only

143. Maria Cizmic, *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

144. Alexander Stein, "Music, Mourning, and Consolation," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 52, no. 3 (2004): 783.

for Cobb, but also for the music community at large, because her work, both sacred and secular, is an important contribution.

This document has focused largely on the *choral* work of composer Nancy Hill Cobb. While the conclusion is undoubtedly that her work should be considered an important part of the choral canon, her instrumental catalogue is also worth a closer look. This is perhaps especially true of her recent orchestral piece, *Shades and Illumination*, commissioned in 2022 by Orchestra Iowa. It is a current winner of the Great Falls Symphony Second Performance Project prize and it, along with her instrumental chamber music, is deserving of further exploration.

Today, Cobb continues to compose. Retired from academic life, she currently resides in West Des Moines, Iowa, where she is enjoying having more time to write and promote her music. Very recently, she has begun to self-publish her work, making previously written pieces available to the public for the first time, and sharing new choral and instrumental works. Nancy Hill Cobb is an important American composer whose still-growing catalogue of music will be performed for years to come.

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APPENDIX A
Catalogue of Nancy Hill Cobb

Compositions are presented in reverse chronological order.

Title	Medium	Year written	Publisher	Year published	Premiere Performers	Conductor of Premiere
The Match	Two Pianos (eight hands)	in progress	*manuscript*			
The Gift to Sing	SATB	2025	*manuscript*		To be premiered by the Stillwater Chamber Singers in May of 2025	
Evening	TTBB and Piano	2024	*manuscript*		University of Northern Iowa Varsity Men's Glee Club	John Wiles
Jublilant	SATB and Two Pianos	2023	*manuscript*		Sioux City Iowa Symphonic Chorus	Josh Nannestad
The Dawn's Awake	TTBB and Piano	2023	SBMP	2024	Ohio State University Men's Glee Club	Robert Ward
Shades and Illumination	Orchestra	2022	*manuscript*		Orchestra Iowa	Timothy Hankewich
Emma's Misadventures in Zoomland (written for virtual performance during the pandemic)	Mezzo Soprano, Trombone and Piano	2020	*manuscript*		Suzanne Hendrix-Case, Anthony Williams and Sean Botkin (online pandemic performance)	Nancy Hill Cobb
The Suffragist	Musical Theater	2016-2019	*manuscript*		The Suffragist Troupe	Rebecca Burkhardt and Rachel Klein
Tumult and Tenacity	Bassoon and Piano	2017	*manuscript*		Cayla Bellamy and Robin Guy	NA
I Dream a World	SSAATTBB and Piano	2016	SBMP	2024	Metropolitan Chorale, Waterloo/Cedar Falls, IA	Amy Kotsonis
Laudate Nomen Ejus	TTBB and Piano	2015	SBMP	2016	Bowling Green State University Men's Chorus	Tim Cloeter
Set Me as a Seal	Soprano and Piano	2015	*manuscript*		Katie Hallman and Nancy Hill Cobb	NA
Tread Softly on My Dreams	SSAATTBB	2014	*manuscript*		Yukon HS Choir	Daren Chapin
Sing We Now of Christmas	SSAATTBB	2013	Colla Voce	2013	Southern Chorale, University of Southern Mississippi	Greg Fuller
Christ the Lord is Risen Today	SATB, Organ and Brass	2012	Sacred Music Press	2018	Sanctuary Choir, Central Presbyterian Church, Terre Haute, IN	Mark Carlisle
Pie Jesu	Soprano and Piano	20??	*manuscript*		Becky Goodin	NA
Three Psalms	Tenor, Cello and Piano	2012	*manuscript*		David Mannell, Kurt Fowler and Martha Krasnican	NA
When Music Sounds	SSAATTBB	2012	Pavanne Music Publishing		North Dakota State University Chorale	JoAnn Miller
Suite for Reeds	Reed trio	2011	Potenza	2018	Trio Canna, University of Wisconsin Steven's Point	NA
Invictus	TTBB with Piano	2011	SBMP	2012	Ohio State University Men's Glee Club	Robert Ward
Opacity and Translusence	Horn and Piano	2010	*manuscript*		Brian Kilp and Martha Krasnican	NA

And Draw Her Home with Music	TTBB with Piano	2009	SBMP	2010	Ohio State University Men's Glee Club	Robert Ward
Christmas Eve at Sea	Chorus and Chamber Orchestra	2008	*manuscript*		Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers	Nancy Hill Cobb
Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep	SSAATTBB	2007	*manuscript*		Florida Gulf Coast University Chamber Singers	Nancy Hill Cobb
Titania's Lullaby	SA with Piano	2007	SBMP	2010	Horizon Middle School Treble Chorus, Phoenix, AZ	Corey Vanderlay
Sea Fever	TTBB with Piano	2006	SBMP	2007	Ohio State University Men's Glee Club	Robert Ward
O Clap Your Hands	SSAATTBB and Piano	2006	SBMP	2006		
Jubilate Deo	SSA	2006	SBMP	2006		
Magnificat	SSAA	2005	SBMP	2006	Rhodes College Women's Chorus	
Gloria	SSA with Flute	2004	SBMP	2005		Darla Eshelman
Raise a Song	SA with Piano	2004	Choristers Guild	2005		
Blessing	SATB	2004	*manuscript*		Stillwater Chamber Singers	Nancy Hill Cobb
Soliloquy	Piano	2003	*manuscript*		Cary Cobb	NA
Hodie	SSA with Piano	2002	SBMP	2003	Oklahoma Baptist University Children's Concert Choir	Darla Eshelman
Laudate Pueri	SATB & SSA	2001	SBMP	2001	Tulsa Children's Chorus, Tulsa, OK	Ginny LeDoux
Laudate Dominum	SSAATTBB	2000		2001	Sine Nomine Choral Society, Shawnee, OK	Nancy Hill Cobb
Terminus	TTBB with Piano	1999	SBMP	2000		Robert Ward
Incidental Music for Professor Filarsky's Magic Invention	Piano	1997	*manuscript*		Nancy Hill Cobb	NA
Cantate Domino (transcription)	SATB with Piano	1997	SBMP	2024	NA	Nancy Hill Cobb
Cantate Domino	SA with Piano	1997	SBMP	1998	Stillwater Boys Choir, Stillwater, OK	Robert Ward
Threnody	Chorus and Orchestra	1996-1997	Hinshaw	2004	Canterbury Choral Society and Oklahoma Philharmonic at ACDA Southwest Division Convention	Nancy Hill Cobb
Make a Joyful Noise to the Lord	SA with Piano	1996	Triune Music	1997		
Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above	SATB with Piano	1995	Hinshaw Music	1996	Oklahoma Baptist All State Youth Choir	Jon Duncan
The Milkmaid's Fable	SATB with Piano	1994	Alliance Press	1995	University Chorale, Oklahoma Baptist University	Nancy Hill Cobb
Antiphon of Praise	SATB with Organ	1993	Hinshaw Music	1994	First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Shawnee, Oklahoma and Ron Lewis	Nancy Hill Cobb
I Will Give Thanks	SA with Piano	1993	Broadman Press Music Makers Magazine	1994	Music Makers Choir, First Baptist Church, Shawnee, OK	June Hodges

Three Songs on the Death of a Friend	Baritone and Piano	1992	*manuscript*		Allen Henderson	NA
Easter Antiphon	SATB with Organ	1992	Leawood Press	1992	Sanctuary Choir, First Baptist Church, Warrensburg, MO	
Be Strong in the Lord	SATB plus brass and organ	1990	South III Antara		Sanctuary Choir, First Baptist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma	Jim Davis
Redeemer	SATB with Piano	1989	Leawood Press	1990	Singing Churchwomen of Oklahoma	James Woodward
In The Beginning	SSAATTBB	1989	Leawood Press	1990	University Chorale, Oklahoma Baptist University	Nancy Hill Cobb
If There is Righteousness	SATB with Piano	1988	Genovox Music Press	1988		James Woodward
A Cradle Song	SSA with Piano	1987	*manuscript*			
What a Friend We Have in Jesus	Flute, Violin, Viola and Piano	1987	Van Ness Press	1988	Janet Sterling, Brian Clark, Larry Cobb and Nancy Hill Cobb	
Laughing Song	SATB with Piano	1987				
Who is America?	SATB with Piano	1987	Leawood Press	1988	Oklahoma Choral Directors Association High School Honor Choir	
Carnival Capriccio	Symphonic Band	1985	*manuscript*		University of Oklahoma Symphonic Band	Gene Thrailkill
The Seven Last Words	Chorus with Chamber Orchestra	1985-1986	Leawood Press	1988	University Chorale, Oklahoma Baptist University	Nancy Hill Cobb
What a Friend We Have in Jesus (written for parents' 50th anniversary)	Violin, Viola, Flute, and Piano	1985	The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (in *The Church Musician*)	1988		
A Wordsworth Triology	SATB with piano	1985	*manuscript*		"Pick up Choir" from Shawnee, OK	Nancy Hill Cobb
Let The Song Go Round the Earth	SATB with piano	1985	Van Ness Press	1986		
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing	Handbells	1984	Van Ness Press	1984		
Festival Prelude on Coronation	Organ and Brass	1984	Broadman Press	1985	Ron Lewis	NA
O Worship the King	Organ	1983	Broadman	1984	Ron Lewis	NA
Toccata	Piano	1984	*manuscript*			NA
Processional on a French Carol	Handbells	1984	Van Ness Press	1986		
Sonata for Viola and Piano	Viola and Piano	1983	Manuscript		Wayne Crouse and unknown	NA
Let Us with a Gladsome Mind	SA with Piano and optional handbells	1983	Van Ness Press	1984		
Five Hymn Voluntaries	Organ	1982	Lorenz	2018	Ron Lewis	NA

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing	SATB with piano	1982	Broadman, The Church Musician	1984	First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Shawnee, Oklahoma	Nancy Hill Cobb
Cantus a Deum	Handbells	1983	Van Ness Press	1984		
Nocturne and Dance	Two Pianos	1981	*manuscript*		Ron Lewis and Sandra Meyer	NA
God of the Earth, the Sky, the Sea	SA with Piano	1981	Broadman Press	1982		
Rejoice in this Day	SATB with Organ and Brass	1981	Fred Bock Music	1984	Crystal Cathedral Choir	James Woodward
Psalm of Constancy	SATB with Organ and Brass	1981	Hinshaw Music	1984	University Chorale, Oklahoma Baptist University	James Woodward
Gloria in Excelsis Deo	SATB with Organ and Brass	1981	Fred Bock Music	1984	First Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir, Shawnee, Oklahoma	James Woodward
My Jesus I Love Thee	SATB with piano	1981	Broadman Press	1982		
A Joyous Ring	Handbells	1981	Broadman Press	1981		
Three Songs for Soprano	Soprano and Piano	1980			Jeri Graham Edmonds and Ron Lewis	
Were You There?	SA with Piano	1979	Broadman Press	1980		
Rejoice!	Unison and Handbells	1975	Broadman Press	1976		
Praise	SATB with piano	1974	Broadman Press	1975		
Come Thou Almighty King	SATB with piano	1974	Broadman Press	1974		
Too Many Times	Clarinet and Vibraphone	1974	*manuscript*		Andrea Splittberger and Robert Rosen	

APPENDIX B
Links to Recommended Performances

"Cantate Domino"
Notre Dame Magnificat Choir
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GZWbNgLcEY

"Gloria"
Webster University Aurelia Choir
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vi1c1I2x0vs

"In the Beginning"
University of Southern Mississippi Southern Chorale
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X91uH7_6Qw

"Psalm of Constancy"
Oklahoma Baptist University Chorale
Conductor: Nancy Hill Cobb
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mz_Nhsln1ic

"Sea Fever"
Ohio State Univesrity Men's Glee Club with Upper Arlington High School Choir
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIyNlwKu-8s

The Suffragist – excerpts
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jDkcICQxQQ

Threnody – excerpts
UNI Concert Chorale, University Singers, and Symphony Orchestra
https://www.nancyhillcobb.com/works

APPENDIX C
Nancy Hill Cobb Education and Employment Timeline with *Threnody* dates

1969	Began attending Oklahoma Baptist University
1973	Graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University (BM, music theory and composition)
	Began attending Michigan State University
	First composition released – "Come Thou Almighty King"
1975	Graduated from Michigan State University (MM, composition)
	Started job at Mercer University
1976	Started job at Oklahoma Baptist University
1981-2	Tenure process at Oklahoma Baptist University, promoted to Assistant Professor
1983	Began doctoral work at University of Oklahoma
1984-5	Took study leave from Oklahoma Baptist University job to pursue doctoral work
1987	Graduated from the University of Oklahoma (DMA, composition)
	Promoted to Associate Professor at Oklahoma Baptist University
1993	Promoted to Professor at Oklahoma Baptist University
1996-7	Wrote *Threnody*
1998	*Threnody* wins ASCAP Rudolph Nissim Composition Competition, Special Distinction Award
2000	*Threnody premiere*
2002	Started job at Dallas Baptist University, Professor of Music
2004	*Threnody* published
2005	Started job at Florida Gulf Coast University, Founding Director, School of Music
2009	Started job at Indiana State University, Chair, Music Department
2011	Became Director of the ISU School of Music (unit name change)
2013	Started job at University of Northern Iowa, Associate Provost for Faculty
2019	Retired

Appendix D:
Choral Conducting Experience of Nancy Hill Cobb

Conducting Positions
Artistic Director and Conductor of the Farrington Grove Chorale, Terre Haute, 2011-2013
Conductor, Masterworks Chorale, Indiana State University, 2010- 2011
Conductor, University Choir and Chamber Singers, Florida Gulf Coast University, 2005-2009
Artistic Director and Conductor of the Fort Myers Symphonic Mastersingers, 2005-2009
Artistic Director and Conductor of the Stillwater Chamber Singers, 2004-2005
Opera Theatre Conductor, Dallas Baptist University, 2003-2005
Founder and Conductor, Sine Nomine Singers, 1998-2002
Conductor, University Chorale, 1985-2002
Conductor, Chapel Choir, 1994-1999
Conductor, Oratorio Chorus, 1993-2002
Conductor, Shawnee Choral Society, 1977-1979

Guest Conducting Engagements
Oklahoma All State Junior High Treble Choir, January 2012
Oklahoma All State Women's Chorus, January 2008
Ohio State University Men's Glee Club, May, 2007
Collier County, Florida Middle School Honor Chorus, April 2007
Irving, TX Chorale and Las Colinas Symphony, February 2005
Singing Women of Texas, July 2004
Tulsa Honor Chorus, November 2001
Canterbury Choral Society and Oklahoma Philharmonic, March 2000
Central Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Ninth Grade Honor Choir, 1999
East Central Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Honor Chorus, 1999 and 1994
Southwestern Oklahoma Honor Chorus, October 1998
Southeastern Oklahoma Honor Chorus, November 1997
Oklahoma Baptist All State Choir, June, 1997
"Music Week" at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center
Norman, OK All-City Choral Festival, November 1996
Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Directors Chorus, July 1996
Tri-State Music Festival Honor Chorus, Enid, OK, 1992, 1994
Northeastern Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Honor Chorus, Tulsa, OK, 1993

Major Works Conducted with Orchestra
Bernstein *Chichester Psalms*
Brahms *A German Requiem* (in English)
Honnegger *Le Roi*
Mendelssohn *Elijah*
Poulenc *Gloria*
Rutter *Gloria*
Vaughan Williams *Serenade to Music*
Vaughan Williams *Five Mystical Songs*

Appendix E:
Awards, Honors, and Professional/Honorary Memberships of Nancy Hill Cobb

Awards and Honors
Great Falls Symphony Second Performance Project Selection, 2025
Edwin Fissinger Choral Composition Competition First Prize, 2011
ASCAP Rudolph Nissim Composition Competition, Special Distinction Award, 1998
ASCAP Standard Award, 1996-2014
Delius Composition Contest, Vocal Award Winner, 1996
Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Director of Distinction, 1995
University Chorale Selected to Perform at:
- Oklahoma Music Educators Association, 1990, 1995
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Church Music Conference, 1994
- American Choral Directors Association Southwest Division Convention, 1990
- Oklahoma Choral Directors Association Fall Convention, 1987

Professional/Honorary Memberships
Iowa Women in Higher Education (Board of Directors)
Pi Kappa Lambda
Sigma Alpha Iota
Mortarboard
Omicron Delta Kappa
American Choral Directors Association
College Music Society

Appendix F
Interview Transcripts

Cobb and I spoke by phone on three occasions over five months, her from West Des Moines, and me from New York City and Oklahoma City. Each interview lasted an hour or more. She was extremely gracious with her time, and we followed up with emails between interviews as needed. My goal was to understand more than the facts of her life and music. I wanted to also get a sense of who she is and what influences her choices and her composition. I learned things I did not expect that have, I believe, enabled me to provide an authentic representation of Cobb's life and work in this document. All three interviews are provided here, and the transcripts have been edited for length and clarity. My words are in italics. Hers are in regular type.

Interview #1 – October 14, 2024

Would you tell me about your childhood?-- when and where you were born and your family, friends, favorite memories? Anything you want to share?

So, I was actually born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My parents lived in a town that didn't have a hospital. They had to drive eighty miles to the hospital. I have two older sisters who are quite a bit older than me, although one of them has passed away. Helen, my older sister, is thirteen years older than me, and my other sister was eight years older than me. Then we moved to Oklahoma when I was almost nine. I grew up the rest of the time in Okmulgee, south of Tulsa, and then, of course, went to OBU.

As far as some of the growing up kinds of things that relate to being a musician, I think it's that we had a family of church musicians, although the ones before me were amateur in a sense. I learned that my grandfather, who died when I was five, so I didn't know him very well, taught singing schools in churches. So, part of the Southern Harmony. They were from Mississippi, and so there's a part of that old Sacred Heart-type…It wasn't Sacred Heart, but it was similar. And then my grandmother played the piano. My mother played piano mostly by ear, although she read shaped notes, so she had a shaped-note hymnal. I think it's actually quite remarkable that all three of us girls, the three daughters, played piano and organ well enough to play in a church for church services.

Did you play for church services?

Yes, but not on a regular basis. I even played at First Baptist Shawnee some a long time ago. I would have to practice my rear off to try to get good enough to do the service, you know, but anyway, my sisters did it on a somewhat regular basis, more so than I did. I don't remember this, but I was told that because my older sisters were practicing piano and everything, that at age three or four I would get up on the piano and point to the music and say, "I'm practicing. I'm playing." I don't remember. I don't know whether it's true. I mean why would they tell me that? I started taking piano when I was six and never stopped until after grad school.

Did you take lessons from a parent or outside the home?

Outside the home. In fact, my older sister at one point connected me with my first piano teacher who must be in her 90s, I don't know. This has not been even ten years, and I did write to her. When I was born, we lived in a little town called Mountainair. Then we moved and we actually did live in Albuquerque. And so, Albuquerque would have been where I started taking piano.

When did you start doing organ stuff?

Must have been in junior high. I played in the band. I played clarinet in the band, and I didn't even sing in the chorus in school because at that point you couldn't be in more than one music organization, if you wanted to get all your pre-college stuff in.

What high school was this?

Okmulgee High School. We had a very good band teacher. His name was Floyd Moyer. We did some absolutely great literature. We did "Chester." I think that's by William Schuman. I believe a lot of my compositional ear came from playing band music more so than…well, of course, church, my church music too…but my contemporary harmonic sense came from playing band music.

Anyway, so organ—I probably took lessons from our church organist in Okmulgee. I didn't play for a service there I don't think. I don't remember doing that, but we had a fabulous youth choir. Back then that was a thing, of course, having a great youth choir, and I would say one of my formative experiences was being at the festival every year where 2000 kids were singing great choral literature. I will never forget singing "How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place" from the Brahms *Requiem* in the Civic Center Music Hall in Oklahoma City with, you know, 1999 other high school students in the Baptist Church. I always think about that.

That was a Baptist youth choir festival or something?

Yes, ma'am. We either went to OBU for the festival, which of course that hall held a lot of people, and the singing was great… This was in the '60s, and we did good music, Stephanie. One formative experience when I was in the eighth grade—we sang Joseph W. Clokey's setting of that text, and I will never forget. I don't remember the music, but I remember the text. I remembered "O Lord God unto whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself." There's so much in that. That's a cry out to God saying, "Why are you letting the wicked run things?" That text stuck

in my mind all my life from the time I was in the eighth grade. For some reason it was burned into my memory. It is such a profound text.

So your choral experience was church, and then instrumental in band at school.

Yes, and then piano lessons. I accompanied beginner choir at church. We had a fabulous accompanist when I was in eighth and ninth grade, and when she graduated, I wanted to be the accompanist.

Was this First Baptist Okmulgee?

Yes, it was. Maybe our heads were in the sand, but Baptists back then were…separation of church and state…I mean, they're not the crazy…I'm sorry, but… Sometimes I feel bad about saying I was Southern Baptist, but we had great music education in the Southern Baptist Church. Glorieta must have been sold, I think, right? Even Ridgecrest?

You know, I don't know.

It was remarkable in the ’70s and ’80s doing every church music week. They did an oratorio, so they did *Elijah*. They did *Belshazzar’s Feast*. You know, I wrote a piece called *The Seven Last Words* that actually had its national premiere the same week that Jim Woodward was conducting *Belshazzar’s Feast* at Ridgecrest.

Both Glorieta and Ridgecrest were in the mountains. Those things have gone away because most Baptist churches want to have a rock band because they think that that's going to draw people. And maybe it does. I don't know.

Are there any specific teachers you would mention as influential?

My piano teacher was Geneva Carr from fourth grade until I graduated high school. I had my piano lessons at 7:30 in the morning because she was a fourth grade teacher. She was a very good piano teacher. And I probably should have mentioned the minister of music at First Baptist, Okmulgee. His name was Guy Lyall. He was the reason that I went to OBU. He was an OBU graduate and he basically built his youth choir the way he was taught at OBU. For a long time, OBU was extremely important to me. I mean, it’s still important. There were great things going on there musically, but there was the point when I thought, “You just can’t treat people that way.”

Because we'll talk about Ernestine later, when we talk about Threnody*, is there anything about your relationship with her growing up that you think is relevant or interesting to the project?*

You know, I don’t think so, and here’s why: I was so much younger. Think about this…she was eight years older than me. In fact, when we moved to Okmulgee, she was a junior in high school and I was in the fourth grade. That's light years different in age. By the time I was in the sixth grade, she was gone to college. So I don't know that there's anything about our relationship as siblings when we were growing up.

Any family history that you want to share? You may have already hit that, but anything else that you want to add?

I think it was that my mother… My parents didn't have a whole lot of money, and so the fact that all of us took lessons faithfully the entire time we were in school, in elementary, junior high, and high school, that's a pretty big commitment on the part of parents.

Your musical education was clearly important to them.

One of the things I think is important to my development as a person and as a musician is that when I went to OBU, I didn't have any specific career goals in mind except that… I was clearly involved in my church quite a bit, and the only thing I could see for myself was I would go and I would marry a minister of music. That career goal changed because I went to school and I saw women who were doing something different. Now, I still couldn't aspire to be a minister of music. I mean, there was a short gap of time in there… I can actually tell you the name of the first woman church music major at OBU. Her name was Marianne Landrum. She was after I started teaching there. But then, of course, the door started closing again. In fact, Stephanie, I've used that story when I had to lead committee training at UNI about implicit bias. I've used that story about my own career goals—how I couldn't see myself doing anything different until I went to college, and how important it is that people who go to college can see somebody like them doing something great. So it was people like Mary Kay Parrish, one of my teachers… I saw Betty Woodward, of course. I saw women faculty members doing excellent things. So that's when… My mother—and I still have it because she gave it back to me—I still have the letter that I wrote to my parents when I told them I wasn't going to be a music ed major anymore. When I said I was going to be a music major, they said, "You have to major in music education because you have to have the ability to get a job." I had to write them this long letter about how I was changing to composition because that's what I wanted to do.

How did they take it?

They said ok. I don't know what they really thought. They kept the letter because I still have it. My mother would keep some things, you know, and I thought that was an important thing that she kept that. Because it changed the trajectory of my life.

What did your parents do?

My mother was a teacher and my father worked for what was called the Soil Conservation Service. He was in agronomist, and so he helped farmers to raise better crops. In a sense, they were both government workers. My mother worked for the local government as a teacher, and my dad worked for the federal government. I would also say this, Stephanie: Back when I was growing up, it was very unusual for women to work full-time outside the home. My mother… I wish I had known enough to say to her before she died, "Wow, you were an amazing woman." I mean, I love my mother, and I'm sure she knew I loved her, but she was even more amazing than I ever knew. Other moms didn't work outside the home, but my parents needed the money. That was how they provided for their kids. I've heard everybody talk about how their mother didn't

work outside the home. I've had my cousins tell me their mothers didn't work outside the home. My mother taught third grade, but because she could play the piano, she taught music too. She was not trained as a music educator, but she was always playing the piano for the Christmas program or whatever. That was when she had forty third graders in her class. Forty! Before class size amendments.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be the wife of a music minister. I don't know whether that's something you say, but if you think about it, I was interested in church music, and I could not see myself as a minister of music.

When you were younger was there anything else?

No. I had a high school counselor who helped people do whatever they were going to do, to go to college or whatever. And I remember sitting in his office, and he looked at me and said, "You should go to an engineering school." And I said, "No." That is a mark that I never saw any women engineers. All you can do when you're growing up is what you see… You can't imagine if you can't see somebody who's doing something different.

I'm sort of processing how the misogyny of the time affected your options and choices.

Even into grad school… I was the only woman in our class of ten theory and composition majors at Michigan State. I had a professor who would, when it was my turn (and this was back with LPs; if you were going to make a presentation, you had a stack of LPs in your class), he would jump up when I was going to put the LP on the turntable and put the needle on and say, "oh, you shouldn't have to do that."

Did you think that that was nice, or did it drive you crazy?

It drove me crazy. When that kind of thing would happen, it was supposed to be polite and respectful, but it's actually saying that you aren't capable. I was the only female theory comp major. You have a cohort essentially, you know, where you're in the same classes because you're in the same class.

You said you decided to change to composition because you felt like you were seeing women faculty members who were doing things other than education. What was it that drew you to composition specifically?

I was encouraged by Claude Bass. Everybody knew him as C. L. He was still teaching at OBU when I started teaching at OBU, but then he left the next year to teach at Southwestern Seminary, and he retired from there. He wrote quite a bit of church music. I remember in my sophomore theory class we had some sort of assignment. I can kind of halfway remember it. You had to take a figured bass and write something that went with a melodic line, and it was in the style of…who knows? Bach or somebody. I apparently did pretty well on that, because I got encouraged by that

kind of thing. And I don't know…I wrote something and then, you know, it's encouragement when somebody…

Now that's not the first music I wrote. I wrote music when I was in high school. I wrote a piece for my high school youth choir. The first arrangement I did was for our little three-part girl's ensemble. We would sing arrangements of hymns and everything, and I did an arrangement for that group in high school. I don't think I wrote anything specifically for piano back then, so it was the choir things that I did.

So, at OBU I got this encouragement, and then I started taking lessons. C. L. Bass was my composition teacher all the way through OBU. He encouraged me to enter a couple of competitions and one of them… By the time I got to my senior year, I had to write a whole recital. I wrote a piano sonata, and that was something I entered into an MTNA competition. One of the judges wrote something like, "I clearly hear the influence of Bartók in this student's writing," and I thought, "I've never even played any Bartók!!" which was funny. So, when I think about where my harmonic and rhythmic sense is, it's from band. We played some excellent music in my high school band.

Tell me about your collegiate work. We've talked about OBU. Anything else we need to know about collegiate work at OBU?

C. L. Bass was a big influence. I wrote a little tiny opera for my honors project. It was called *And on Earth Peace*. I had faculty members who agreed to be in the little opera. Jim Brown sang in it. Jim Woodward sang in it. And Jim Brown sang in my senior recital. I mean, the faculty were really nice to me. They helped me a lot.

And then after OBU, Michigan State?

My teacher there was H. Owen Reed. He was known for his compositions for band more than other things. That was a time when composers were urged to be more avant-garde. If I looked back at my master's thesis, you know, it had a lot of box notation and everything. I think it's kind of interesting the way composition has gone these days. Nobody's doing that kind of thing very much at all anymore. I think composers have figured out that a lot of people don't want to listen to atonal music. And so why would you spend time writing it if nobody wants to listen?

You know, it was interesting, because we were still doing ink on vellum. Back in the dark ages you had to use ink to write your music. The biggest motivation when I was in school was that they had figured out erasable ink on a kind of plastic sheer paper. And I watched my compositions go into the machine. I finished my masters in 1975. It was early '80s when things started to go towards a computer.

That sounds exhausting.

No, it was exhausting. And even in the 1980s…I remember when I was at OU, and I was hard at work on my project, my document, *The Seven Last Words*, and we were so excited because

copying machines had gotten so much better that you could actually write your scores in pencil and they would be copied dark enough.

Anything else you want me to know about Michigan?

Not really. I think one of the things that I learned, it just doesn't have anything to do with composition, is that it was kind of a stretch for a girl like me who grew up in Oklahoma to go off by herself to a northern cold state where there were very few Baptists. I basically remember thinking, "Well, people are all the same. They're just a little bit more reserved up here."

My next question was going to be what did you learn.

I remember that I put OBU on the map by this one professor who said, "Where did you go to undergraduate? You're such a good student." He had never heard of OBU, of course.

And after that was OU.

So it was an eight-year gap. I started at OBU. Then I got married. So there are some interesting things… You might find it interesting that I went up for tenure in 1981-82. I was pregnant for the first time then, and I was dead level certain that I didn't want anybody to know I was pregnant until after I got tenure, because I just didn't trust anybody. I was three or four months along before anybody ever knew.

You got tenure before anyone knew?

Yes, I did. I was Assistant Professor. I could see I wasn't going any farther in promotion without getting a doctorate, so that's why I started the next year working on a doctorate.

*It's pretty impressive to go all the way to Assistant Professor without a doctor*ate.

It was a different time. The end of the baby boom generation was still there and colleges all over the place needed people teaching because they were they were having burgeoning enrollments. It was just a different time. And I think any time you have a smaller arts college, they're more likely to hire somebody without that. I don't think it's that way anymore, but it's sure was back then.

So from Michigan State, did you end up back teaching at OBU? Was that the timeline?

No. My first job was at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Have you heard of Mercer?

Nope.

Okay. Well, Mercer's a pretty good small liberal arts college in Macon, Georgia, and it had Baptist roots. It was not nearly as Baptist as OBU was, but it was still Baptist. They now have both a law school and a medical school. Anyway, that was my first job. I was only there for a year, and then I came back to OBU.

Were you still teaching at OBU while you were going to OU?

I applied, and by that time I had taught theory, and this was before I did the Chorale, so I taught mostly theory and composition. There was this yearly meeting of all the theory teachers in Oklahoma called the Oklahoma Theory Roundtable. I had become acquaintances and friends with Jim Faulconer and Dr. de Stwolinski, who was the head of the theory department back then. They knew me because I would go to these meetings. Sometimes there were presentations and all this kind of thing. And so when I was at Michigan State, I had completed more than was necessary for my master's degree. I completed something like ten hours more. And the statute of limitations on work like that counting towards your doctorate at OU was something like six or seven years. I was right on the cusp. I appealed it, and they accepted some of my over-and-above credits from Michigan State. So I essentially did not have to do any music theory. The only thing I did a couple times was a directed reading with Jim Faulconer. I did an analysis of the Britten *War Requiem*, the orchestration in it, because I wanted to learn some more orchestration methods.

But essentially, in 1985, I took a year leave from OBU and went to school full time. They called them study leave, and they paid you half salary. I managed to get my coursework in on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I drove over… Cary was two or three years old at that point.

So you got to take that year in '85 to get the courses done and then retain your position at OBU. Anything else you want me to know about your time at OU?

Michael Hennagin was an interesting teacher, and I think I kind of gave him some interesting ideas, having been a person who was already a faculty member somewhere. He might have learned a few things from me because we would talk about… I don't know how your general exams were, but we were sort of given some of the topics, but one of the things that I had to put together was a composition curriculum. I remember being asked about this, because one of the things that I touted was that when you taught composition, you taught your students to write music for performers around them, because they needed to hear rather than, you know… And that was important because I was at a place where you didn't hear very many instrumentalists. I mean, a long time ago, you just didn't have very much in the instrumental way. And so if you don't have a string quartet where you can actually hear it played, why would you write it? I remember him looking at me and going, "oh."

He was an interesting guy. He had been an orchestrator for Jerry Goldsmith. I think one of the things I really appreciated about Michael Hennagin was that he let me write what I wanted to and in the style I wanted to write. He didn't try to force me into some avant-garde thing. And ultimately, I think the world of composers have come back from avant-garde, so it was a good thing! I just didn't want to do that stuff. I was appreciative of that fact. From that standpoint, he was an excellent teacher. It wasn't that he just sat there and let me write. He had really good comments, and I think I grew a lot as composer there.

Would you say that he was the most formative of your composition teachers or your OBU teacher? You spoke highly of your OBU teacher as well.

I liked all my teachers, and I learned different things from them. I'd like to say that they were the right people for the right time and where I was. I mean, I started my doctorate when I was thirty-two or thirty-three, so that's not like a twenty-five-year-old starting your doctorate.

Are there any pivotal moments, and you may have already told me everything you want to about this, but as you look back…any pivotal moment you can pinpoint that led to your career as a composer?

Well, I think it has to be at OBU. C. L. Bass was my theory teacher who saw something in me and of course, when you're sitting there as a sophomore in theory, you don't know what other people are writing, right? You have no idea. And so if I had not gotten that encouragement, I would have never thought of studying and taking my life in that direction. Once you make that decision to become a composer instead of a music educator, where supposedly you can graduate and you can get a job… Well, there was no way I was going to graduate from college and have a job as a composer. So, I think that had to have been pivotal encouragement at the age of nineteen.

These two questions come as a pair, and maybe they're hard, I don't know. The questions are: What things are you most proud of, and what do you regret? And you are allowed to pass if you want to.

I'll say that the two things that I'm proudest of… *Threnody* is one. Ultimately, that combined my knowledge of choral music and my orchestral writing in one thing. I feel like artistically it's one of the best things I've ever done. And I feel like it is something that speaks to people, so that was one. *The Suffragist* is the other. The interesting thing there is that I'm sitting here still trying to find a second performance of it. I don't care whether you are at the community level, the professional level, the college level, even high school wasn't immune from what the pandemic did to them. *The Suffragist* needs at least twenty-six actors. That costs money, because that's twenty-six sets of costumes. But what those women did was monumental, and I didn't want to write something for seven or eight characters, because that would not do them justice. We're working on starting a nonprofit, American Women Heroes On Stage, and trying to see if we can raise the money where we're able to offer grants to people who will do shows that celebrate American women heroes like *The Suffragist*.

Do you want to answer what you regret?

I'm not sure this is a regret… The last twelve years of my academic career was essentially in administration. And when you start going on in administration, you have less time to do things that are about your discipline, right? Now, I learned a lot by being an administrator that I would not have known otherwise. One of the things that I learned is that for university professors, there are market driven salaries. It's not true so much in K-12 education. It doesn't matter what your discipline is in K-12 education, but at university level, music and theater people are at the bottom of the totem pole as far as salaries are concerned. And I'm not sure I would have known that or understood it as much if I had not been in administration and had the ability to work out a lot of salaries across the university level. Quite honestly, for me, doing those twelve years of

administration allowed me to be much more stable financially. But it took away from being a composer. I did write at least one piece every year. So do I regret being an administrator? No, because I believe that I positively impacted a lot of places by being an administrator, because I had seen what being a less-than-good administrator would do to people. I tried to be somebody who understood the lives of faculty and could think about things from their side.

This is kind of an interesting story that just happened recently. I did a choral clinic with this high school down the road at Waukee High School and a great conductor. They were doing solfege out the wazoo, and I was so impressed with them. They were doing one of my men's pieces. And then I heard his a cappella choir. I sat there, and I thought, this is a really good choir. He told me that he had done "When Music Sounds," which is a choral piece that has not been done that much because it's hard. And here's this high school guy who's done this piece. So, I said, "They need to do 'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep.'" It has never been published, because it was written right before I left Florida Gulf Coast University. I actually wrote it before Steve died, but there are all sorts of things mixed up in that… I kind of just set it on the shelf, because going into a new job, you're not worried about, "Do I get this sent in to the publisher?" So any regret is that I was not more proactive in promoting my own music.

That makes sense.

I actually pulled that piece out and I thought, "Yep, this is a pretty good piece," and I've sent it to this guy to see if they'll do a reading or performance sometime, because I think it's worth being out there. But it's fifteen years old, and I didn't do that fifteen years ago. So I regret that I have these pieces and that, because I was doing administration, I was not promoting my own music.

So, I have intentionally not asked personal life questions. But if there's anything of that that you want me to know or include, I'm happy to. But I have sidestepped that intentionally.

Well, I think one of the things that is true for heterosexual couples or same sex couples who decide to have children… These days I think there's a lot more division of labor. I think it's gotten better. I think there are still some places where it's not, but anyway… I love the fact that I have a family. And if you have a family, there are times when you don't do those things that are extra on top of what you have to do for your job.

I did learn one thing over time. When I was at OBU, and that was twenty-six years, and that was essentially most of the time my kids were growing up, we never got any load credit for doing our scholarship and creative activity. It was just gravy on top. When I went to both Florida Gulf Coast, but also more importantly, when I went to Indiana State and I had to go through their tenure process, I learned that I accomplished as much as anybody who was at a university where they got load credit for doing their writing. We always taught a full load at OBU. Most of the time, if I was going to write any music, it had to be in the summer.

Then from OBU, the very next step after that was into administration, right? OBU was the last musical step in the journey?

No, I was at Dallas Baptist University for three years. You know my story about leaving OBU right?

I have not heard.

Ok, well there was the salary equity… I think it was right before the Sean Baugh incident happened, but the salary equity thing happened in ’93-’94. That's part of who I am as well with being in that male dominated field, but learning that a person who had been there the same amount of time was making $10,000 a year more than I was… When you're at $30,000 a year and somebody else is making $40,000 a year, that's a lot of difference. That's 25% more. And so that's a whole other story. So [an administrator] got raked over the coals because he didn't handle me very well. But then in the next year or so, Sean Baugh was in the Chorale. Sean was a trumpet major—smart, talented, really great guy. He was doing his student teaching up at Edmond, and he got beat up and put into the hospital. He was in Will Rogers Park. And I don't know whether you…

Yeah.

Yeah, so the only way OBU knows is that there was a police report. He was in the hospital and had to miss some student teaching. They find out that he’s gay and they're going to discipline him for that because it's against the Green Book. Of course, they've never disciplined anybody for getting pregnant while they're there even though that was against the Green Book, but anyway… They wanted him to go through conversion counseling and by that time, I was a full professor and I had been through the salary thing. I mean, they couldn't fire me without… I mean, you fire a tenured professor over something like that, and… I felt my oats quite a few times standing up for other people. So I made the rounds around the university to every administrator that I could talk to—[the Dean of Students], [the Dean of the College of Fine Arts], [the Provost], blah, blah, blah, all of these people—saying, “What you're doing to him… Yes, he needs counseling, but he needs counseling because he got beat. Let him choose his counselor.” They wouldn't. They expelled him.

That just sent me away and made me a bad name with [the Dean of the College of Fine Arts] on now two things.

So…I had had a long running frustration over the fact that the Bison Glee Club and the University Chorale met at the same time, and we didn't have enough men. We needed to separate them out so that people could sing in both. I went in to [the Dean of the College of Fine Arts]’s office in 2002 because I had learned that I only had five men returning the following year, and I thought, “We're dead. There aren’t enough freshmen coming in.”

[The Dean of the College of Fine Arts] called me in and said, “You're not going to conduct the Chorale anymore.” I told Chorale the next day that I'd been removed as director, and all hell broke loose. I knew that I had an ace in the hole if I wanted to use it. When OBU had settled with me over the pay equity, there had been a non-retaliation clause. What happened there could have been retaliation. I will never forget what he did and what he said to me later: “Well, if you hadn't

stirred up all the hornets' nest, I was going to put you back in." That was the best lesson I ever had on how not to be an administrator.

I then spent my entire summer not sleeping on the couch and listening to Matlock at two o'clock in the morning. The job came up at the DBU and I applied for it.

So, you started at Dallas Baptist in what year?

2002. And I was there until 2005, and then I went to Florida Gulf Coast.

Was Florida an administration job?

Yes, I was the founding Director of Music there. I wrote the curriculum, hired the faculty, recruited the first class of students, managed the money, and planned a building. That was a good experience.

That story about Sean is terrible

He and I had coffee three years ago, and I said, "I don't remember anything about that except I was angry with everyone that I went to talk to." I was so angry. He said, "Here's what I remember: you told me, 'Wherever you have to go, I will go with you.'" So, I'm apparently somebody who said that. I was just remembering how angry I was.

Did he not get to graduate because he was expelled?

That's correct. He graduated from Southern Methodist University. It's awful. It's one of the most unchristian things I have ever seen, well at that time. Now there are many more unchristian things.

My last question for you is kind of broad, and you might want to think about it, or you might not want to answer it, but it's just—What do you want people to know about you?

I want people to think I was a good composer or know I am a good composer. I think I am. But that I'm more than a composer, that there are things that I've done that of course inform my being a composer. I don't think I would have ever written *The Suffragist* had I not experienced things like the salary equity thing at OBU or some of the things I dealt with at Indiana State as an administrator. I thought that discrimination against women was only in the Baptist world, and I found out it was everywhere. It's worse in the Baptist world, but it was everywhere. Those kinds of things affect you as an artist, and they drive you to make statements in particular ways.

Interview #2 – December 20, 2024

Okay, then… What drew you to writing music? We talked about how you wrote some things even in high school.

I don't know why I did that. I mean, who was I to think that I could write something that somebody might want to do? I don't remember any of the thoughts about that. I did write a piano piece for my senior recital (laughs).

What music did you listen to growing up?

You know, this is weird. I mean, I was in a conservative family, conservative town, conservative influences, and so I was not one to buy the 45 or the 78s or whatever and get into pop music. Some of my friends did, but… I do believe, if you think about how my writing has turned out, the way I do harmonies and melodies and rhythm and everything, that I was influenced by what I played in band.

Yes, we did talk about that.

Okay, so I am a person who believes that composers are… Their brains are like everybody else's. They're computers and so whatever you hear, doesn't matter where, it becomes part of the input into your brain, and it comes out as output sometimes when you don't know it's going to, if that makes sense.

Sure.

It is definitely the band, and if I think about time, I didn't have a whole lot of time to just listen to music. I didn't do that. I was in school, I was practicing the piano or the clarinet, and so I didn't listen to a lot of music. School, practicing the piano, practicing the clarinet, church.

I get it. Do you have favorite composers of your own?

Well, I love Bartók. I love Bernstein and I love Hindemith. I love Stravinsky. As far as more contemporary composers, I do like John Adams quite a bit and Benjamin Britten from the choral standpoint. I don't know who I've left out, but those come to my mind quite a bit.

Tell me about your compositional style or in your opinion, what makes your music sound like it's yours?

I am definitely a composer who likes a tonal center. Because we were supposed to do it when I was in my master's program, I did dabble in some things that were atonal and that kind of thing. What was really nice about studying with Michael Hennagin is that he didn't force me, and he let me be in the style that I was. He was a tonal composer too, so maybe that was why, but I think the big thing is that he helped me within my own style.

So, tonal, but I don't like traditional key relationships, so there's no way my music stays in some key that everybody likes. If I'm going to start in C major, then a lot of times I'm going to go to a third-related key, not anything that's common practice, you know, and even a chromatic third-related. So I may go from C Major to E, and E Major is not something that people love (laughs).

And that may be a conscious decision, but it's also something that I just hear. And I'm sure that's because of the music that I have listened to, back in the day.

I also am not one to use a leading tone very much. Every once in a while, I do, but most of the time I'm going to be using some sort of modal scale, or I'm avoiding that seventh scale step. That's just what I do.

You know, I was having a conversation the other day with a musician friend who plays tennis, and we were talking about writing parallel fifths. This is a person who's a little bit younger than me, and she's a very fine musician. She asked, "If you teach theory now, do they still not let you do parallel fifths?" and I said, "Well, you know, writing in the twentieth-century style, of course you're going to have parallel fifths, but there's a lot to be said for all of that discipline of common practice voice leading, because it has to do with musicians being able to do it. There's a lot to be learned from common practice voice leading. So, you find a lot of parallel fifths in my music, but I'm still keeping all those voice leading principles in there.

And I suppose if there's one other thing that I consider part of my style, it's that I really want my music to be performed. In fact, Michael Hennagin and I had a huge conversation when I was working on my doctorate. It was a huge conversation of, "Why should I write something for academic purposes so it can get bound and look pretty and sit on a shelf? That's not music. That's an exercise." I do want my music to be performed, so therefore I'm trying to make sure that the listener doesn't have to process complex harmonies, complex melodies, and complex rhythms at the same time.

I will tell you when I learned that lesson. I was working on my master's degree, and one of my projects was to write some music to a poem that [a colleague] wanted to do a choreographed dance to. It was "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which is a T.S. Eliot poem. I wrote music for this poem to be read, orated with my music, and then there was dance. I attended this performance, and I thought, "This is too much for anybody to try to comprehend. You've got dance on the stage. We've got this poem that you have to delve into to understand what it's saying, and then you've got my pretty complex music underneath it." You have to think about the listener. Can the listener actually make any sense of what you're doing? So that was something that really informed me quite a bit.

Can I ask about your use of meter, you know, changing meter? Is that text driven? Or how do you make those choices?

I'm a lot more likely to do that in instrumental music than I am in in choral music, but it does happen in my choral music. I don't know whether I told you this, but I'm writing this just-for-fun silly thing for eight hands, the tennis piece, because there are four people who play tennis together. We're all in the same club and we do we run in each other's circles, just because we're talking music part of the time, and not all the other tennis players do that. I thought, you know, it would be fun to write a piece for the four of us to play. So, I have. It's for two pianos and eight hands. This is a case in point. I'm writing along and writing along and then then, "boom," what I hear is a change in meter, and it's at a change of key, and I'm changing things, and it's all in the realm of, "What's a good surprise and what's a bad surprise?" I think that's something I do to try

to keep the listener engaged. Now, in choral music, yes, it's absolutely going to be driven by text, because the text is the master. Why use text if the audience can't understand what you're saying?

So choral music, probably text driven, but in instrumental music…

I'm sure it was because of playing Persichetti and playing William Schuman's "Chester Overture" and stuff like that. I mean, you know what band music was… Band music is a lot more progressive. It always was more than orchestra music. I look back and I think how I really had a good band director. He pulled out all that stuff for us, you know, we went to contest and did all that.

Jim Faulconer was a theory teacher at OU. I had been teaching at OBU for or six or seven years when I decided to go back and do my doctorate. And in those six and seven years, every year we had the Oklahoma Theory Round Table, and people from all over the state would go visit each other's places. It was unorganized organization. I mean, not disorganized, but it was not an official... Nobody paid any dues. There was no official president. We just existed to meet each other and find out what was going on in music theory in our schools. I was part of that for six or seven years. And so by the time I started my doctorate and I had a few theory credits, Jim Faulconer, he had worked alongside me in the Theory Round Table, and he was really nice… I appealed to maybe get some of my credits from Michigan State to count for my theory. So I never had an actual theory class at OU, but… and that's all to go back to… Well, I did a directed reading and analyzed the orchestration of the Britten *War Requiem*. And that was a very informative project. I think *Threnody* is related in my mind to that piece because Britten took the poems of Wilfred Owen from World War I, so they were way back, but then he did it in the context of whatever cathedral that was that they were reopening in 1960 after World War II. He mixed up traditional texts with texts that weren't… Well, in 1960, something that was in 1918 or '19 or '20 was not that old, right? I think the other thing that really informed me while I was studying that orchestration is that, for some reason, I had this thing when I was writing choral music that, "Oh, we don't want to double things for the choir because they're going to sing those notes." I really learned that the purpose of the orchestration is not to help the singers, although it can. But the purpose of the orchestration is to add color. And so doubling the line is great and fine and wonderful. And there are times when you drop out the orchestra entirely, like in *Threnody*, the words "they break in pieces thy people and slay the widow and the stranger." There is nothing under that because I wanted every word to be heard.

Did I tell you what Jim Woodward told me one time and how much he influenced me? …and he was not a composer.

I don't think we talked very much about Jim Woodward.

He was a really, really fine choral conductor and well respected all over the country. He had a kind of charisma that made everybody just sit up and, you know, try to take in everything that he had to say. But I remember when I was first on the faculty at OBU. I wasn't conducting and I was just teaching theory and composition. I wrote some things for the University Chorale, and I'd take them to him. He'd have me play through them and everything. I will never, ever forget this (and this was actually before I did my doctorate with Michael Hennagin). He would look at a

passage and he'd say, you know, this is inordinately difficult. And I want you to quote that because…"inordinately difficult." In other words, it's difficult, and it doesn't have to be. He would explain, "The rest of this piece is at a particular level of difficulty, but just this one measure or these two measures, that means that I'm not going to choose to do this piece." I can't tell you how many times I've said that to a composition student. You need to not make the piece be thrown out just because you've written a couple of measures of really crazy stupid stuff, you know?

I wondered how much the OBU Chorale was sort of a, I don't know if "muse" is the right word, but how much that was sort of a workshop environment for your choral music.

Oh, absolutely. I do believe that you have the best of both worlds when you put a piece in front of a choir and you're the conductor. But the other thing is that doing new works by other composers, being a composer, I was much better at being able to interpret what the composers wanted.

"In the Beginning" is a piece—I wrote it for the Chorale. In fact, I think it may be the only piece ever that was just totally dedicated to the Chorale. We did it, and then Greg Fuller performed it at University of Southern Mississippi on some ACDA program or something. The recording that's on YouTube is his choir, and it's a fantastic recording—exactly how I thought of that piece. And it's unaccompanied, except there's sandblock in it (laughs). Sandblock!

Do you notice consistencies or patterns in your melodic or harmonic structures? You talked a little bit already about open fifths and not using the leading tone and modality, things like that…

I think when I'm writing choral music, I'm very definitely still—no matter how many parallel fifths I use or whatever—I'm still testing and checking and making sure that the voice leading works and that people can sing the lines and so forth. I want it to be lines.

Can we talk about your compositional process a little bit?

Sure. So, the last commission I did, just completed this fall, was for the University of Northern Iowa Varsity Men's Glee Club. The process I did with that is very much the same process I have used over and over again when I'm writing choral music, and that is the text drives everything. When I have the text, I type it on a page or pages or however/whatever I need and space it out so that I can doodle rhythm underneath. And this is how I taught composers how to do this too, or I had them at least try.

I start with no meter, but you know, I'm also definitely going to speak the poem out or the text out loud so I can hear how I'm going to say it. I speak it see where the natural emphases are and then I go back and see, well does this fit in the meter? And then sometimes you need to change meters or whatever. And so that becomes the basis of how the text is set.

Simultaneously, I'm thinking about the poem, or whatever it is that you're setting, and thinking, what's the mood of this? I try to make sure that whatever I put in an accompaniment sets the mood for the text and compliments it. I try to be friendly to conductors and choirs and

accompanists in the keys that I choose. But of course, a lot of times it's going to be related to what the range is, you know, because of the tessitura and all those things. Then I start putting notes to it, and it goes!

Oh, I guess there's one other thing I do. If I'm looking at a poem, I'm trying to find where the natural places are that there should be a change of music. So if it's a three-verse poem, am I going to actually write it in a strophic structure or am I going to make that second verse new music? I haven't written very many strophic things. That would not be my style.

I see that. How do you go about selecting a text?

I am probably going to try to have something that's in public domain because the hassles of trying to get permission…but if not, and it's been a while since I did this, but I would go through books and poems and more anthologies, not of one poet, but of many poets. Back when I was doing my doctorate, I did a three-piece choral work on Wordsworth's poems.

For church music I often used King James, just because it was in public domain. And I find the King James to be more poetic, especially the psalms.

Do you have preferred tonalities or preferred modes that you find yourself going back to?

Well D major is a really good key for singers, and part of that is because you know, the octave between D and D above Middle C is pretty good for all altos and sopranos. And if you want to use the fifth for the sopranos, the A is not too high. It's not too bad if you decide to have the tenors… I mean, it's just a good key for singers.

Because of ranges?

Yeah, right, ranges. You know if you use C major maybe the low C is too low for some of the bases and G is not quite high enough for the brilliance you want. I used to think of the relationship of some colors with keys. And I always thought that D major had a sign to it. It was a yellow key to me. It was bright. It's really kind of silly. And flat keys seem to be a little more somber.

What about modes? Anything you want to say about that?

Oh well…you know the flat seven is in a lot of my melodies. If I'm going to use the seventh scale degree it's going to have the flat seventh. So that would be Mixolydian mostly. If it's something in major, there's going to be a flat seven there somewhere.

Yep. I see that. Okay, right turn a little bit. I'm interested in performances of your music that you would consider notable.

Darla Eshelman… so there was a piece that premiered in the Disney Concert Hall at an ACDA conference. That's the "Gloria." It's an SSA piece that has flute in it. That was fun. And of course, the *Threnody* premiere at the southwest division ACDA conference.

What are your favorite compositions of your own? Do you have favorites? I feel like I maybe know the answer, but I'll let you answer the question first.

I do think that *Threnody* is the piece that displays my skill as a composer best, because it is with orchestra, and I think I did a pretty good orchestration for it. I think it's dramatic. I think, whether people think it's hard or not, it's still accessible, and I think audiences respond to it. And I like hearing it. So I would say I feel like that is my best work to date.

I know this is a little crazy, but I do like "Psalm of Constancy," maybe it's because we did it so much, but again, it works. My husband Terry is a graduate of Luther and knew Weston Noble pretty well. A couple of years before he died, I was up there with Terry at some function and he introduced me. Terry said, "This is Nancy Hill Cobb," and [Weston] looked at me and he said, "Oh, I've done your work! I've done 'Psalm of Constancy.'" So you know, it did make some circuits there, and I do feel like it stood the test of time.

Other than that… I think "In the Beginning" is a piece that I love. I like it. If you haven't heard it, look it up on YouTube and listen to it.

"Cantate Domino" that's written for two voices and then they asked me – the SATB version just came out this fall. The "Cantate Domino" has earned me more money than other piece, and at one point it was in the top five sellers ever for Santa Barbara. It's been done all over the world.

That's what I thought you would say about Threnody. *And I thought you would mention* The Suffragist*, but you didn't.*

Oh, because I was thinking about choral music. So if I can add that in there…I love *The Suffragist*. I think it's good. It's not widely popular. We're still trying to get second performance and we're working on it.

That's kind of a good segue to talking about the different ensembles that you write for. The bulk of your output is choral music, yes? Why do you think that is?

I think it's because when I first started out that was the vehicle for my compositions. I always had a choir at OBU, you know, and not just one choir. It's ironic that a lot of the music I've been commissioned to write has been for men's chorus, but I don't believe any Bison Glee Club ever did any of my music. I don't think so…especially in the last few years. Bob Ward at Ohio State says there's not enough original music for men's chorus.

When I was writing *The Suffragist*, I didn't do any music. I was just swamped with that. It was a five-year project, but right before that I did a piece for the Bowling Green State men's choir. I've done several for Ohio State. That brings up… Can I add a favorite piece? "Sea Fever" for men's chorus, because I like the piano part in it.

That reminds me to say, I have assumed that piano was always your primary instrument in your studies. Is that true? I don't want to assume.

Yes, that's true. When I was at Michigan State… I went there as a composition major, but you have to take an instrument. They put me with Ralph Votapek, bless his heart. He had all piano majors except me. I'm going, "Oh you poor guy. You have to you know, deal with me and my piano." He was the first Van Cliburn winner I think, and there he was teaching this person who wasn't even majoring in piano.

I asked you about favorite compositions of yours. Do you have favorite compositions by other composers?

Yes, I do. Somebody the other day was talking about John Rutter. I didn't mention him as an influence, but he probably was because I get a lot of his music. His *Gloria* is a really fantastic piece of music. I think that's the best thing he ever wrote. I think the other ones are fine, but that one was stunning.

Other pieces… Well, *Chichester Psalms*… Let me think about this… Well, I love the Brahms *Requiem*. Of all the oratorios that are from a common practice period, that's my favorite because I think it was just beautifully written. I realize that's a long dead composer, but it's one of my favorites.

I might say that, in terms of difficulty, your pieces have become a little bit more accessible over time. Would you agree with that?

I would agree with that. And I would say that sometimes it's very much intentional, like the last piece that I wrote for Bob Ward. He specifically said, "I want something that I can take out to the high school choirs." And sometimes that's actually harder to do, just because you have to think really carefully about how you're going to voice something, and how much four-part harmony are you going to put in there?

You're basically only writing music on a commission basis right now, right?

Right. Except for this piece for eight-handed piano that's about a tennis match. (laughs)

Okay, here's the end. How would you like to see your music used in the future? And sort of wrapped up in that, how do you want to be thought of and remembered as a composer? You can answer those as one thing or separately.

I think… I want, because the words are so important to me… I want the performers to enjoy performing it and to be challenged, and I want the words to mean something to them. I want the way I've set the words to make sense with them. Drives me nuts when I'm trying to sing in a choir and the syllabification… and I'm going, "Why did you set that that way?" But anyway, I want the listener to be able to relate. I want the music to speak to them as well as the words.

OK, amazing! I think that's what I needed. Thanks so much.

Interview #3 – March 16, 2025

I have a few questions, just specifically about Threnody. *I've gotten into the music already, of course, because I wanted to write most of the analysis before I started asking questions, so that's where we are at this point. Would you tell me about the genesis of* Threnody*? Where it came from, why you wrote it?*

Absolutely. So there were kind of two things happening simultaneously…or three, maybe.

After the bombing…Ernestine's and my mom died on June 30 that year. It was three months after the bomb.

Oh my goodness.

One of the difficult things for Ernestine was that she was going through all the trauma with the bombing, but she had been going through trauma regarding my mother, and I was really busy with a thirteen-year-old and a nine-year-old at the time. Basically everything we were doing was going through the motions and doing what had to be done at that time. And so then my dad moved to a retirement center in Yukon, and that was also traumatic because we had to clean out his house and all that.

So long story short, it was Easter of 1996 when we got together with my dad and then took him back to his place and sat and talked to him. That's the first time we had actually talked in over a year. Ernestine told me she was doing this journaling and that she had written a poem.

This is where the simultaneity comes in. At the same time, somewhere around there, Michael Hennagin died. I can't remember exactly when. I think it was actually before my mom, but I don't know. His wife started this composition contest in his honor. I wanted to write something for his composition contest because it was for chorus and orchestra. It began to dawn on me that there could be some things that could all go together. That my sister's poetry might work with some traditional texts, because I had been fascinated by how both Vaughn Williams and Benjamin Britten had combined traditional texts with liturgical or biblical texts.

And so that's the genesis. We had this conversation, and I said, "Well, could I see it?" And then you don't know as a sibling…it was like, "What if I don't like her poetry and I don't want to use it?" And then I'm sure simultaneously with her it was, "What if I don't like what she writes?"

So I embarked on it. I still had the same children to raise and everything, but I remember that I spent a lot of time that summer writing it.

And then it didn't win the Hennagin thing, but somebody who had been in the know told me… blah, blah, blah, it was a close second.

Aw.

Yeah. And then because of that, I decided to enter it into the ASCAP thing. The ASCAP competition was in 1998. I don't remember whether it was during that year or in 1999 that I got the call from the ASCAP people and they said, "You didn't win, but we chose your work as one of three or four in addition to the winner that got a special distinction award." At that point, it had never been performed.

Wow.

And so that's when I approached Debra Spurgeon. She was president of the Southwest Division of Oklahoma Choral Directors Association at that point. So I talked to her about it. And so that was when they decided that it should be on the Southwest Division convention in Oklahoma City in March of 2000, which was the five-year anniversary.

That leads me into, what do you remember about the premiere performance?

Steve Coker was the conductor of the Canterbury Choral Society. I think Deborah arranged for Steve Coker, and they managed to arrange for the Oklahoma Philharmonic, which was actually quite remarkable. Steve prepared it. I went over for a couple of rehearsals.

There were a few people in Canterbury who were unable to handle the emotion of singing it, and Steve just said, "I understand. No worries. See you later." You could imagine…only five years later…and 9/11 had not happened yet…

I conducted and Steve prepared the choir. It was in First Presbyterian Church. There were two performances, and one of the things that went on is the choir was way back there. And the brass was back there too, and of course, the thing that the choir heard the most was the brass, because they were right back there. It was difficult. And so what I remember about the first performance is that the part in the last movement where it's going fast and then there's this place where the baseline goes, "bom, bom, bum,"… The brass decided they were going to be in charge, and they slowed it way down too much. It's the big slower section before the final fast thing, "Quonium magnus…" and loud. So the brass was just controlling and it was too slow. And I was so disappointed, but I thought, okay, I've got another chance. I bored holes through them on the next performance, and they followed.

So Threnody *was performed then, and then again by UNI, right? Are those the only performances to this point?*

Oh, no. When I went to Dallas there was a performance. The Irving Chorale was conducted by Harry Wooten, and the DBU Chorale and Irving Chorale collaborated on it. That would have been about 2004 or 2005. There was a performance by the Mastersingers in Florida. I did it on a concert with *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Vaughn Williams, because I felt like they were good paired works, and they did a good job of it. Somewhere, there was a performance in Pennsylvania, but I never knew the person or anything. I just knew that it happened because I googled it or found it out or something. There's the UNI performance. Somebody also did it with just piano in Northwestern Oklahoma. Maybe up at Alva, can't remember exactly.

I still have every intention of reorchestrating it for chamber ensemble to be done by small choirs. You know, the fall of '26 will be a big anniversary of 9/11.

Yes, and this work, you could set it down and nobody would know that is not written about that. I think I've told you this story, but the day 9/11 happened, I was watching the TV and the reporters were saying when the tower came down, it looked like diamonds were falling from the sky. That's the phrase from Ernestine's poetry, "diamond shards of glass and horror." It just came to my mind because that was her poetic version of what happened.

It's weird that we're talking about this and I'm looking at One World Trade Center at this moment.

Oh, wow.

Let me tell you what I know about Ernestine, and then if you think you should add anything, would you do that, would that be okay?

That's great, yeah.

She worked at the library, right? She was sitting at her desk, and she had just turned away from her window when the bomb went off. It seems like she was pretty incredibly affected by everything that happened, and it became sort of a lifelong thing for her, finding groups of people to process with and help and all of that. I also read that a therapist told her, "You've got to write or talk about this to avoid PTSD." And so that's why she started journaling. What else do you think I need to know about her as far as her contribution to this work?

She had glass in her hair for a while…like days… I don't remember how long, but you know, getting glass out of your hair is not easy if it's little tiny pieces.

She didn't have her car for several days because it was in the perimeter of everything.

And I think what hit her really hard was the children who were supposed to be in her library. If it had been thirty minutes later, if they'd have been gone, they wouldn't have died. They'd have been in the library for story time, because they always came. The children in the daycare were coming to her thirty minutes later. That just haunted her.

All right, now for musical things. Um Do you happen to recall what order you wrote the movements in?

No… Maybe in order.

I wondered. The reason I ask is because it seems very much narrative to me. It seems very through composed with the purpose of enhancing the text. It doesn't seem to be about any kind of musical math. It doesn't seem cyclical. It just seems through composed, not just by movement, but it seems like you thought of it from beginning to end.

In the attempt to incorporate her words, but also make this universal…make it where there are things that go back into the past… "Agnus Dei," "Lord, have mercy on me." Or "Lamb of God, have mercy on me"…but have mercy, as in, we don't know what's going to come…combined with her saying, "We didn't know it was coming." This is how the morning started. And then her text when she was talking about grief, I thought of the "Absalom, Fili Mi." And quite honestly, that's my favorite movement.

It is a lot. It's very hard. I think, emotionally.

You probably have already recognized this, but when there was some really important phrase of text, it's either in unison or unaccompanied, because I wanted text to come through.

So now, through composed…I might have written the "Cantate Domino" before the interlude, but I don't I really don't remember. That's been a long time.

What makes "Absalom, Fili Mi" your favorite? Well, I like my dissonant counterpoint. I like the woodwind parts.

Why did you choose to end it on a hopeful note?

It actually has to do with Ernestine's poetry. She talked about how people got together. She says a tiny bud of hope emerges, and then her poetry says, "Arise, you'll thirst no more. Love has healed your silent mind. Arise, my soul, sing a new song, sing a new song. Sing a new song."

Is that the actual end of the poem? I wondered if you were the one who made the choice to end there or if she did.

Well, if we're talking about the god that we all hope exists, I don't believe that that god wants us to remain unhappy. And that god somehow finds other people or situations to help us to be able to move on to put one foot in front of the other. That's why I ended it.

If a director wanted to pull out something to do as a stand-alone piece from this, I would suggest "Cantate Domino," what about you?

Yes. The Mastersingers did it themselves several times. I feel like it's fun to sing. To most choir people who've done a lot of choral music, that text is familiar even though it's in Latin.

I also think that "Ubi Caritas" can stand alone.

I agree with that. Ernestine talked to me quite a bit about being in this group where people leaned on each other together. Together is how they healed. And so that's why I chose "Ubi Caritas"… When we get together…where there is charity and love, God is there. That's the idea of people loving each other. It' very communal after that.

That seems very in line with her story.

Yes, exactly. It's very much in line. She went around helping other people. I mean she went to Africa one time to help, and it wasn't a bomb or anything, but some sort of tragedy that happened and so anyway…

"Ubi Caritas" is not that difficult. It's got some…lots of clusters. I could never have been a person who wrote minimalist music, but I have some nods to minimalism in this piece. The "Ubi Caritas" was specifically thought of that way. I don't have very much harmonic motion in it, but the cluster chords keep it still quite interesting.

Is there anything else you want to tell me about the music itself? I mean, I could get into specific movements with you and what I've written about them, but I don't know that we need to do that.

No, I don't think there's anything else. You've really grabbed it.

My last question for you, which you might want to think about and tell me later, or type later is—I'm interested to know, what was the emotional cost to you of writing this piece?

Well, let me think about that. And let me see if I can come up with something, because I don't know that I have any. I am going to have to go back to think about it.

And if you don't have an answer, that's okay too.

Appendix G
Letter from International Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Human Research Determination Review Outcome

Date: September 21, 2024

Principal Investigator: Stephanie L Keegan-Moring

Study Title: Nancy Hill Cobb's Threnody: A Conductor's Analysis

Review Date: 9/18/2024

I have reviewed your submission of the Human Research Determination worksheet for the above-referenced study. I have determined this research does not meet the criteria for human subject's research. Therefore, IRB approval is not necessary so you may proceed with your project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. Thank you.

Cordially,

Kendra Williams-Diehm, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board