

DANIEL KNAGGS

# Of Time and Passing

Three songs for unaccompanied choir

EIGENTUM DES VERLEGERS · ALLE RECHTE VORBEHALTEN

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# Texts

## I. Life

(original Portuguese by Olavo Bilac (1865-1918), translation by Daniel Knaggs)

In the river's water seeking the sea,  
In the endless ocean,  
In the light which enchants us,  
In the mountain rising through the air  
In the streakless sky that graces our eyes  
In the greatest star,  
In the humblest plant;  
In the wind's voice,  
In the sun's gleam;  
In the base insect,  
In the age-old tree,  
The life of the universe throbs and sings!

The rough stone is alive, even in his sleep!  
Everything is alive! And late at night, in all the silence,  
Perhaps this harmony we hear,  
Flowing through the air, veiled in vastness,  
This sweet music, is the voice  
Of the soul of all, celebrating life!

## II. To everything there is a season (Ecclesiastes 3)

To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:	
Time to be born, a time to die;	a time to gather stones; Time to embrace, time to refrain;
A time to plant, a time to pluck up;	A time to seek, a time to lose;
A time to kill, a time to heal;	A time to keep, a time to cast away;
Time to break down, a time to build;	A time to rend, a time to sew;
A time to weep, a time to laugh;	A time for silence, a time to speak;
A time to mourn, a time to dance;	A time to love, a time to hate;
A time to cast away stones,	A time for war, a time for peace.

### III. Into Your Hands (from Psalms 31 and 39)

*Into your hands I commit my spirit...*

“Lord, let me know my end,  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting my life is!

*Into your hands I commit my spirit...*

Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.

Surely every man stands as a mere breath!

Surely man goes about as a shadow!

Surely for naught are they in turmoil;

man heaps up, and knows not who will gather!

Hear my prayer, O Lord,

and give ear to my cry;

hold not your peace at my tears!

For I am your passing guest,

a sojourner, like all my fathers.

O spare me, that I may know gladness,

before I depart and be no more!”

*Into your hands I commit my spirit,*

*You have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God...*

#### OF TIME AND PASSING (2016)

Commissioned for VOCESS with generous funding from the Barlow Endowment (to be confirmed)

*Of Time and Passing* (2016) is a cycle of three choral songs written specifically for the London-based ensemble, VOCESS, taking into consideration their versatility and ability to beautifully intone a range of vocal colors with precision and grace.

The first song, *I. Life*, sets my translation of the poem *A Vida* by Brazilian poet Olavo Bilac (1865-1918), a poet I discovered while studying Brazilian Portuguese at the University of Michigan. I was drawn both to the simplicity of the text and to the possibilities of teasing out dual contrasting moods. In the beginning and end, this song explores a texture that is very much alive: wave-like contours, throbbing sounds, and plenty of flowing movement. Rising eighth-note motives in particular emphasize the fleetingness of life. But in the middle of the song, the listener is given a slowed-down atmosphere to savor life's beauty.

*II. To Everything a Season* capitalizes on VOCESS's ability to effectively interpret popular genres a capella. This ancient text is taken from Ecclesiastes (dated around 300 B.C.) but I set it to a modern, rhythmically-regular and percussive pop-style idiom. Since popular music in whatever era is designed to appeal to a specific “present time”, it is by its very nature ephemeral, and therefore seemed an apt metaphor to evoke the transitory nature of seasons.

*III. Into Your Hands*, confines the writing into no more than four parts, often with octave unisons. This creates a more direct and word-focused setting in which the Psalmist's urgent words are placed at the forefront. Largely homophonic, this song is at times chorale-like, at times madrigal-like, finally relinquishing its tension into peaceful rest, proclaiming “*You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God...*”

for Voices 8  
**Of Time and Passing**

Olavo Bilac (1865-1918)

Daniel Knaggs

I. Life

Flowing ♩ = 104

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR *p*

BASS *p*

5 *mp* (both sopr.)

In the riv - er's wat - er seek - ing the sea,

9

in the end - - - less, o - cean, end - less

o - cean, end - less

in the end - - - less, in the end - - - less

in the end - less o - cean, end - less

16

*p* in the light

*p sub* o - - cean, [ooh]

*p sub* [ooh] [ooh] light

*p sub* [ooh] [ooh] light

21

which en - chants us, in the moun - tain ris - - ing

ris - ing

which en - chants us, in the moun - tain, moun - tain, ris -

which en - chants us, in the moun - - tain ris -

27

air, ris - ing, in the streak - less sky that

- through the in the moun-tain ris - ing, ris - ing, through the air, that

through the air, through the air, in the moun-tain ris - ing, ris - ing, in the streak - less sky that

-ing through the air, through the air, that

ing through the air, through the air, that

↑ (Baritone filler?)