

ALEC ROTH

Song
of the
Shepherds

A
Christmas
narrative for
unaccompanied choir

(SATB)

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Song of the Shepherds was commissioned by Little Saint Mary's Church, Cambridge, in celebration of the 400th anniversary of the birth of the poet Richard Crashaw, who was a priest at the church from 1638 to 1643. The first performance was given by the Choir of Little Saint Mary's, directed by Simon Jackson, Little St Mary's, Cambridge, 12 April 2013.

The words are taken from 'In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God a Hymn Sung as by the Shepherds' by Richard Crashaw (1613-1649).

Come we shepherds whose blest sight
Hath met love's noon in nature's night;
Come lift we up our lofty song,
To wake the sun that sleeps too long.

Gloomy night embraced the place
Where the noble infant lay.
The babe looked up and showed his face;
In spite of darkness, it was day.
It was thy day, sweet and did rise
Not from the east, but from thine eyes.

Welcome to our wond'ring sight!
Eternity shut in a span!
Summer in Winter! Day in Night!
Heaven in Earth, and God in Man!
Great little one, whose glorious birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

We saw thee in thy balmy nest,
Bright dawn of our eternal day;
We saw thine eyes break from the east,
And chase the trembling shades away.
We saw thee, and we blessed the sight;
We saw thee by thine own sweet light.

Poor world (said I) what wilt thou do
To entertain this starry stranger?
Is this the best thou canst bestow?
A cold and not too cleanly manger?
Contend, ye powers of heaven and earth
To fit a bed for this huge birth.

I saw the curled drops, soft and slow,
Come hovering o'er the place's head,
Off'ring their whitest sheets of snow
To furnish the fair infant's bed.
Forbear (said I), be not too bold;
Your fleece is white but 'tis too cold.

I saw th'officious angels bring
The down that their soft breasts did strow,
For well they now can spare their wings,
When heaven itself lies here below.
Forbear (said I), be not too rough;
Thy down though soft's not soft enough.

The babe no sooner 'gan to seek
Where to lay his lovely head,
But straight his eyes advised his cheek
'Twixt mother's breasts to go to bed.
Sweet choice (said I), no way but so,
Not to lie cold, yet sleep in snow.

Duration: 5½ minutes approx.

Song of the Shepherds is recorded by The Sixteen, conducted by Harry Christophers, and is available on CD and as a digital download on the album "Song of the Nativity" on the CORO label (COR16146).

for Simon Jackson
and the Choir of Little St Mary's, Cambridge

Richard Crashaw

Song of the Shepherds

A Christmas Narrative for Unaccompanied Choir

Alec Roth

Allegro

S *f*
Come lift we up our

A *f*
Come lift we up our

T *f* (robust, hearty)
Come we shep-herds whose blest sight hath met love's noon in na-ture's night; come lift we up our

B *f* (robust, hearty)
Come we shep-herds whose blest sight hath met love's noon in na-ture's night; come lift we up our

Misterioso (meno mosso)

6 *mp* (clear, distinct)
loft-y song, to wake the sun that sleeps too long. Gloom-y night em-

mp *pp*
loft-y song, to wake the sun that sleeps too long. dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn

mp *pp*
loft-y song, to wake the sun that sleeps too long. dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn

mp (clear, distinct)
loft-y song, to wake the sun that sleeps too long. Gloom-y night em-

11

- braced the place where the no - ble in - fant lay. The babe looked up and showed his

dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn

dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn

- braced the place where the no - ble in - fant lay. The babe looked up and showed his

15

face; in spite of dark-ness, it was day. It was thy day, sweet and did rise

dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn It was day. It was thy day, sweet and did rise

dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn dnn It was day. It was thy day, sweet and did rise

face; in spite of dark-ness, it was day. It was thy day, sweet and did rise

20

Allegro
ff (*gioioso!*)

not from the east, but from thine eyes. Wel-come to our won-d'ring sight! E -

not from the east, but from thine eyes. Wel-come to our won-d'ring sight! E -

not from the east, but from thine eyes. Wel-come to our won-d'ring sight! E -

not from the east, but from thine eyes. Wel-come to our won-d'ring sight! E -