

*L a n d s c a p e*

*with  
the fall of*

*I c a r u s*

SATB, with  
Amplified Piano

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## *Program Note*

**W**illiam Carlos Williams (1883-1963) describes a painting by Brueghel in which Icarus drowns, a tragedy lost amidst a cacophony of spring's ascent, the grind of everyday labor, and the lifeless whims of the sea:

According to Brueghel  
when Icarus fell  
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing  
his field  
the whole pageantry

of the year was  
awake tingling  
near

the edge of the sea  
concerned  
with itself

sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wings' wax

insignificantly  
off the coast  
there was

a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning

In setting these words, I have chosen a bitonal idiom, reinforced by an unusual accompaniment: amplified piano. By using modern electronic projection to

amplify the sympathetic resonance that occurs when the choir's sound interacts with the piano's strings, one can hear the awakening of spring, as well as feel intimately the joining of the supernatural with the real.

This piece is written in such a way as to reflect the overtone series, which should be reflected in the piano's passive "singing" with the choir. Additionally, note the paradoxical nature of its use of both dissonance and consonance. By highlighting both harmonic environments, I have strived to paint the words of Carlos Williams directly.

**I**f you listen closely, you will hear Icarus' flight to the sun: the piece climaxes (briefly) as he reaches that rare apogee, before plunging back to earth "insignificantly". It is as much a threnody to his audacity, a hymn to his heroic flight skyward as it is a somewhat cynical commentary on humanity's careless indifference to suffering.

I have chosen to use chance, or "aleatory" technique in painting the piece's texture. The introduction of a random element (carefully contained within the tyranny of the barline) means that it will never be exactly the same twice. In doing so, I hope to highlight the lesson of Brueghel: that life, even an insignificant life, is valuable simply because it is the rarest of things.

It is our own failure, then, that so often a life goes "quite unnoticed".



21

**3/4**

*p*

*pp*

*ppp*

*mp*

**4/4**

S. far - mer was plough - ing When I - car - us fell

A. far - mer, It was spring, I - car - us

T. far - mer, in his field in his field I - car - us,

B. far - mer, (I - car - us) I - car - us,

Pno. (with LH)

29

**4/4**

*mp*

*mp*

*mp*

*mp*

**4/4**

S. The whole pa - gen - try of the year, of the year was a - wake

A. pa - gen - try of the year was a - wake

T. pa - gen - try was a -

B. pa - gen - try was a - wake

Pno. (plucked)

35

S. *ppp* ting-ling near *p* the sea con cerned with its-

A. *ppp* ting-ling near *(a few altos)* *p* I - car - us, I -

T. *ppp* wake ting-ling near *p* (I - car - us)

B. *ppp* was a - wake ting-ling near *p* (I - car - us)

*(plucked)*

43

S. self sweat - ing in the sun *ff* in the sun, *mp*

A. car - us, in the sun *ff* in the sun

*ff* in the sun

*ff* in the sun

*gliss.*

*(gliss up and down with fingernail on strings)*

48

S. *p* in the sun un- sig - ni - fi-gant - ly, —

A. *p* that mel-ted the wing's wax I - car - us, —

T. *p* that mel - ted I - car - us, I - car - us,

B. *p* in the sun I - car us, I - car - us,

Pno. *molto rit., conducted*

3/4 2/4

56

S. *molto rit., conducted* coast there was a splash, a

A. *stagger breathing* off the coast was a splash, a

T. I - car - us I - car - us, a splash, a

B. I - car - us, I - car - us, splash, a

Pno. *conducted*

2/4 4/4 3/4 4/4 3/4 4/4

63  $\frac{4}{4}$

S. splash, This was I - car - us, I - car - us drown ing—

A. splash, I - car - us, I - car - us, I - car - us, drown ing,—

T. splash, This was I - car - us, I - car - us,

B. splash, quite un no - ticed I - car - us, I - car - us,

Pno. (*sim.*) (*plucked*)

71

S. I - car - us drown - -

A. drown - - ing *pp*

T. I - car - us I - car - us, I - car - us,

B. I - car - us I - car - us, I - car - us,

Pno. (*plucked, cont*)

Repeat random times, 30-40 seconds ↓

76

S. ing.

T. I - car - us, I - car - us, I - car - us, I - car - us. niente

B. I - car - us, I - car - us, I - car - us, I - car - us. niente

Pno.

*soli deo gloria*

## Performance Notes:

There are several non-standard techniques that form the core of this piece, and will thus affect its performance:

### *Amplified Piano:*


Inasmuch as the Piano part is a resonating body that is meant to be activated by the singer's voices, it is instructed that it be amplified, so that the ringing effect that is created when the choir's sound causes various strings to vibrate can be clearly heard. Care should be taken to ensure that it is placed on stage in a location where it will "catch" the sound of the choir. As instructed, the piano player should leave the sustain pedal depressed throughout the performance so as to create a series tone clusters activated both by the singer's voices. The piano part should be played as softly as possible to avoid overwhelming the choir through the amplification.

### *Aleatory Techniques:*

In passages where small, stemless noteheads are used, these notes are to be sung freely, with any rhythm or combination that the singers or players feel appropriate. All singers/players should use different rhythms to create sound clouds. Where necessary, I have included the text to be sung with these notes. Additionally, note that there are dotted hairpins that are occasionally superimposed over the arrows noting the beginning and ending of aleatory sections. These hairpins denote the general level of intensity (as expressed by volume, rhythmic frequency, etc). that should guide each section. Note that they are guidelines, not strict crescendo or decrescendo markings.

There are also sections of piano music that should be played by plucking the string instead of using the keys. Any technique should be sufficient in these cases-- fingernails, pennies, small pieces of wood; as with the regular piano music, the volume should be carefully managed so as to avoid overwhelming the sound of the choir, especially at low volumes.

### *Conducting Aids:*

I have also included a series of conducting cues, denoted by this symbol:  These markings denote where clear guidance from the director will be needed to ensure the correct entrance for each part. I have also chosen to include dotted measure lines to show the alignment of measures and entrances/exits. Finally, note that the last two measures should be repeated at the conductor's discretion, and gradually fade out into nothing over the span of 30 to 40 seconds.