

Two Mennonite Songs

The Sleeping Preacher

Leftover Blessings

for SSA Chorus, Solo Voices and Piano

Poems by

JULIA KASDORF

Music by

BRUCE TRINKLEY

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***Two Mennonite Songs* are settings of poems by Julia Kasdorf from her collections *The Sleeping Preacher* and *Poetry in America*. The collections are published by the University of Pittsburgh Press which has given permission to use the poetry in the musical settings.**

The choruses were composed during a residency at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico in Taos, New Mexico, January through April 2012.

Duration: approximately 5 minutes.

The Sleeping Preacher

About the time guilt got the best
of the Fox sisters, and they confessed
the rappings were not messages
from the dead to comfort their friends,
but only the girls' toe knuckles cracking,
about that time, the Sleeping Preacher came
to the Valley. Our great-grandma saw him
swoon across the front pew
and preach against jewelry,
fancy dresses for women, and photographs.
That day she threw all the old daguerreotypes
in gilt and red velvet cases, all the prints
of her parents on their wedding day,
of the milk wagon parked outside their barn,
and herself in high button shoes
into the cookstove. She stoked those flames
to burn away the sins
that might keep her kin from rising
on the last day. She did not think of us,
only to save us, leaving nothing
for us to touch or see
except this stubborn will to believe.

Leftover Blessings

His dinner on the stove, Grandpa smirked at our jar
of pickled eggs and beets, "Old maids' picnic,
party for hens." They still let Bertha come
since she married so late and someone so mean.
(Who could begrudge all those children a mother,
besides it was she who taught that proud Amishman
to drive in her own new, black Plymouth.)

They had a spot under the hemlocks
by a stream on Back Mountain, the Valley's
leftover blessings: Elsie and Miriam,
the three Stayrook sisters who crocheted and sang
and Mary and Loamie who lived on the home farm
like girls – calling all the chickens by name,
milking goats and Rosie the cow by hand,
feeding geese and guinea hens just for fun.
Winters they hooked rugs from wool rags,
heating only one room in that great, dark house.

The only child among women, I couldn't imagine
them young or waiting for dates, though I'd seen
the photograph from Rehoboth or one of the ocean cities –
five of them lined up, laughing in the surf,
thin, dark-haired, hiking their skirts.
I never guessed they might have chosen
to stay with women.

I only felt the weight of the way
they heaped my plate and touched my hair,
or the picnic games they made only for me.
How they cheered while I raced against
invisible children, sparing me the indignity
of three-legged relays, bestowing balloons
and butterscotch. So much for just one child,
I thought. This is what it means to be a blessing,
enough love left over to give prizes for nothing,
for just showing up, being young, being born
the granddaughter of a man someone married.