

Winter Songs

for SATB Choir (Divisi)

Thomas J. Dempster (BMI)

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Winter Songs

for SATB Choir (Divisi)

Thomas J. Dempster

on texts by Howard Vigne Sutherland

West Columbia, SC / Hot Springs, AR / Nebraska City, NE

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Winter Songs (2025) – Duration: ca. 10:00

for Kara

texts by Howard Vigne Sutherland (1868-1943)

- I. In Winter (ca. 2')
- II. Klondyke Roses (ca. 3')
- III. December (ca. 5')

Program Notes

Winter Songs is one of only a handful of choral works of mine in 2025 – a domain I have so far shamefully neglected composing more for, and I don't know why – if I find the right poetry, the work sings itself back to me.

These pieces, certainly meant to be performed as one unit, could be performed individually or in other groupings, though I would ask they be performed in order, regardless of omission.

Winter Songs started life in autumn of 2012 when I was taken with the realist, turn-of-the-century poetry by Howard Vigne Sutherland in his collection *Out of the North*. The poetry chronicles the harsh, bleak, yet beautiful and alien winters in Alaska and the Yukon, a far cry for the Californian author – South African by birth who became a US Citizen in 1895 – who was a journalist and playwright by trade. The poetry captures the various sensory experiences through an unusual mixture of dated language and high metaphor amongst the barrenness, loneliness, and somber darkness of a six-month winter.

"In Winter" is a quiet, melancholy invocation of sorts that tells us precisely our environment and place, though moments of sunlight dare peek over the horizon. "Klondyke Roses" meditates on the ephemerality of an Arctic spring and summer, an optimism and longing for warmth and the sun that are short lived, as the eponymous blooms. "December" paints a similar picture of cold-weary, snow-blinded isolation that gives way to the hope of the thaw and the coming Spring, only to end with a wolf call that at once not-so-subtly reminds us of the "savagery" of nature but also a unique form of kinship from one solitary being to another. Lonely, but not alone, awaiting the turn in seasons...along with the dormant trees, birds, and wolves.

This work is dedicated to my spouse and dear friend, Kara Gunter. She makes every winter brighter and warmer.

Performance Notes

Nearly all of the three poems are used, though a line is omitted from "December" to assist with phrasing and pacing. Only a few selected *divisi* are clearly marked. Throughout most of the piece, eighth division pulse remains constant. That does change in the third movement, but the eighth is constant throughout the first and second.

"in Winter" –

Tenors are fine to sing *falsetto* as needed in order to accommodate upper-register lower-dynamic areas.

Long-held syllables that are not direct text (oo, ah, etc) should remain *senza vibrato* throughout.

In m. 34 et. seq., the basses have an unvoiced, whisper-like direction on syllable "hah" – the vowel shape should remain fixed throughout.

In m. 51, the soprano numbers may be thinned out if a true *forte-piano* cannot be achieved.

The word “silence” at the end of the song should dwell too much on the *essive* and the final *essive* sound should be *sotto voce*.

“Klondyke Roses” –

The melody/tune (apparent m. 64-71, e.g.) can be at least a little detached, but not overly staccato.

Monosyllabic motives or pitches can generally take vibrato in the movement, but minimize it in mm. 132 to the end.

The “buzzing” in m. 88 should be all consonant, no vowel. And at least a little humorous.

The “plucking” in m. 110 does not have to agree in length between soprano and the rest (duh) and excess glottal k sounds are cool.

Assume all “mm” syllables are *bouche fermé*.

In this movement (and in the third), some sections only get half or part of a word before cutting off or decrescendoing to nothing. Prime example is m. 143-144. In m. 144, the *essive* should not be too hard or grating and allowed to fade and fizzle out into nothing.

“December” –

Several places are marked as “half” or “half section” and returning to all singers is marked (or placed as a cautionary for other sections that may be at rest or entering against half-section singing).

Falsetto is both marked for tenor and bass in obvious places, but can be used sparingly as needed by low voice sections.

M.163 “Oh” should not take vibrato; neither should sopranos in 167-168.

M. 221 should be in time.

The explanation for mm. 227-228 should be clear in the score. If not, each section begins together in time and over the stated number of repeats (a minimum of 4 to 5, more is fine) singers become more independent and can increase or decrease velocity through repeats. A section does not need to stay in time with itself, nor any individual singers. Cutoffs are terraced as shown. In m. 227, the altos are separate: the lower half holds the pedal C4 for the length of the upper triplets, diminuendoing to niente. In m. 228, the entire alto section is combined. M. 228’s only difference is the dynamic shaping. The intended effect is a momentarily melting, if not a becoming-static sound mass. Just for a moment. Like a treat.

I’m uncertain I need to explain the wolf calls, but I will anyway. One (or two) tenor soloists should howl like a wolf where shown. The pitches in m. 237 are more or less what I want, but I’m fine with approximation. The call in m. 240 should be substantially longer, start on approximately D4 and descending before suddenly (without portamento up) hit a high, unspecified pitch to be held and then a gradual descent out of falsetto into chest voice. Please DO NOT allow a fast “ow ow owwwwwoooo” (akin to the wolf howl in “Thriller” or that awful Duran Duran song [but Tom, which one!?!?]). This is a lone, solitary, *cold* wolf howling. If it doesn’t cause too much distraction, the howler(s) can turn away from the audience or even perhaps be offstage (I’ll let the choir director navigate that one) to maximize the distance and loneliness.

“Terrible” can be drawn out and I’m fine with additional fermatas throughout the last little line of text, “long-drawn out and terrible.” Makes sense.

from *Out of the North* (1913) – H. V. Sutherland

I - "In Winter"

Beneath the snow the mosses sleep
Amid the forest's silence;
Above, the stately birches keep
Unbroken vigils.

The spruce trees dream of summer hours
And birds that carolled sweetly,
Of gentle winds and smiling flowers
That died too quickly.

II - "Klondyke Roses"

When melts at last the lingering snow
In sunny days of May or June,
Amid the velvet mosses grow
Shy roses, fragrant-smelling.
A fated sisterhood is theirs,
They sigh their souls out wistfully;
No bee makes love to them or hears
Their tender love a-telling.

They dream, perhaps, of distant lands,
(O lands, that seem as far-off spheres;)
Of love-lit eyes and tender hands
That pluck far happier roses.
But while they dream the days pass by
And August comes with ebon nights,
And sombre is September's sky—
And then their sad life closes.

III - "December"

Beneath a shroud of unpolluted white,
The frozen hills lie silent and asleep;
And moveless spruce and ghostly birches keep
Their silent vigils through the endless night.
The frozen creeks, long voiceless, partly veiled
'Neath drifting snow, dream fondly of the trees;
Within the woods no bird's song and no breeze
Make wondrous music when the skies have paled.
The kingly sun ne'er sends his laughing rays
To wake the hills and warm the trees and streams;
His face is hid, and hid are now the beams
That woke the world on long-dead summer days.
The patient moon with all her silent train
Of maiden stars patrols the roads on high,
And watches well all things that sleeping lie
Till Spring's first song shall waken them again.
The white world sleeps, and all is very still,
Except when rises on the frosted air
From out its chilly and forbidding lair
A lone wolf's howl, long-drawn and terrible.

Winter Songs

I. In Winter

for SATB Choir a cappella

Thomas Dempster (BMI)
Text: Howard V. Sutherland

Lontano $\text{♩} = 92 - 96$

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

p *mp*

Be - neath the snow the mos - ses sleep — A - mid the for - est's

8

S

A

T

B

poco *p* *pp*

si - lence; A - bove, the state - ly birch-es

si - lence; A - bove, the state - ly birch-es keep un - bro - ken vi - gils.

17

16

S

A

T

B

mp *mf* *mf* *p* *mf*

Be - neath the snow the mos - ses sleep A - mid the for - est's si - lence;

the snow the mos - ses sleep A - mid the for - est's si - lence;

mos - ses sleep A - mid the for - est's si - lence;

24 *mp* **25**

S *mp*
A - bove, the state - ly birch - es keep un - bro - ken vi - gils.

A *mp*
A - bove, the state - ly birch - es keep un - bro - ken vi - gils.

T *mp*
A - bove, the state - ly birch - es keep un - bro - ken vi - gils.

B

32 *pp* **33** *p*

S *pp* *p*
Oo And birds And birds that

A *pp* *p*
Oo And birds birds that

T *p*
The spruce trees dream of sum - mer hours And birds And birds that

B *p*
The spruce trees dream of sum - mer hours And birds And birds that

39 *mf* *sub.p* **42** Slower ♩ = 69 - 72

S *mf* *sub.p*
car - roll'd sweet - ly,

A *mf* *sub.p* *p*
car - roll'd sweet - ly, Of gen - tle

T *mf* *sub.p* *p*
car - roll'd sweet - ly, Of gen - tle winds Of gen - tle winds

B *mf* *sub.p* *p* *unvoiced; a chilly wind*
car - roll'd sweet - ly, Hah

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46 *p* 48 *fp*

S Of gen - tle winds Oh

A winds Oo

T 8 Of gen - tle winds and smi - ling flow - ers

B Hah Ah Oo

mp *mp*

52 54 ♩ = 132 (♩. = 44) *pp*

S A - mid the for - est's

A Be - neath the snow the mos - ses sleep A - mid the for - est's

T A - mid the for - est's

B *p* *pp* *mp* That died too quick - ly. Be - neath the snow the mos - ses sleep A - mid the for - est's

58 *attacca* 5"

S si - lence;

A si - lence;

T si - lence;

B si - lence;

II. Klondyke Roses

Winter Songs

Jaunty; Bright ♩ = 138 - 144+

64

60

Soprano *mf* Ah Ah When melts at last the

Alto *mf* Ah Ah

Tenor *mf* Ah Ah *mp* Ah

Bass *mf* Ah Ah *mf* *mp* Oo Ah Oo

72

66

S lin - ger - ing snow In sun - ny days of May or June, A - mid the vel - vet

A *p* *mf* Oh In sun - ny days May or June, *mp* Oo Oo

T Oo Ah Oo Ah Hah Hah Oo Ah Hah Oo Ah

B Ah Oo Ah Hah Ah Oh Ah Oh

76

74

S *p* *Slower* ♩ = 88-92 moss - es grow Shy ro - ses, fra - grant - smell - ing.

A *p* Ah Oh Shy ro - ses, fra - grant - smell - ing. *mp* chantlike A fa - ted sis - ter - hood is

T moss - es grow ro - ses, fra - grant - smell - ing.

B Ah Oh ro - ses, fra - grant - smell - ing.

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88

In time *mf* *mf* (♩ = ♩) In time; slower ♩ = 66 *mf*

S
sigh — their souls out wist - ful - ly; — makes

A
theirs, They sigh — their souls out wist - ful - ly; — No bee — makes

T
sigh — Bzz! — makes

B
sigh — Bzz! —

89 *mp* (♩ = ♩) *f* Slowly

S
love — to them or hears Their ten - der love a - tell - ing.

A
love — to them or hears Their ten - der love a - tell - ing.

T
love — to them love a - tell - ing. tell - ing.

B
love — to them love a - tell - ing. tell - ing.

97 Come Prima ♩ = 112+

S
(O lands, that seem as far - off spheres;)

A
mf *p* *mf*
They dream, per - haps, of dis - tant lands, (O lands, that seem as far - off spheres;) Of

T
mf *p* *mf*
dream, per - haps, of dis - tant lands, (O lands, that seem as far - off spheres;) Of

B

106

mf *p* *mp* *pp* *f*

S Oh hands That pluck far hap - pi - er ro - ses. But

A love - lit eyes and ten - der hands pluck Ah ro - ses.

T love - lit eyes and ten - der hands pluck Hap - py ro - ses.

B eyes and ten - der hands pluck Oh ro - ses.

mp *mf* *mp* *p* *pp*

114 Poco vivo ma rall...

rit.

117

A chill in the air... = 80

p

S while they dream the days pass by And som-ber

A while they dream the days pass by And Au - gust comes with e - bon nights, And som - ber

T Mm... nights, And som - ber

B

f *p* *dulling; cold* *p*

127

S is Sep - tem - ber's sky- And som - ber is Sep - tem - ber's sky-

A is Sep - tem - ber's sky- Oo

T is Sep - tem - ber's sky- And som - ber is Sep - tem - ber's sky-

B sky- And som - ber is Sep - tem - ber's sky-

mp *pp* *mp* *p* *mp*

131 **132** Thawing ♩ = 104 **136** Poco Giocoso ♩ = 110+

S *p* Mm... Ah Ah Hah

A *pp* Ah Hah Ah

T *p* Oo

B

140 **A Tempo** ♩ = 100 *Rall...* *mp* *Rall. al fine* ♩ = 76 *mf*

S *mf* And then their sad life Clo... Ah

A *mp p* clo - ses. sss *mf* Ah

T *mp p* clo - ses. sss *mf* Oo *p* Hah

B *mf* And then their sad life Clo... *mf* Oo *p* Hah

III. December

Pale ♩ = 72 - 74

148

S

A *p* half section (div.) *pp* all
white, The fro - zen hills lie si - lent and a -

T *p* half section *pp* all
Be-neath a shroud of un-pol-lu-ted white, The fro - zen hills lie si - lent and a -

B *pp* 3 soloists falsetto
Fro...

154 **155** *all p* *sub.p*

S And move-less spruce and ghost-ly birch-es keep Their si-lent vi-gils through the

A sleep; Oo ghost- keep Their Mm... vi-gils through the

T sleep; through the

B sleep;

pp *pp* *pp subito* *p*

161 **163** $\text{♩} = 72 - 74 (\text{♩} = \text{♩})$

S end-less night.

A end-less night.

T end-less night. The fro-zen creeks, long voice-less, part-ly veiled

B Oh

pp *pp* *mp poco parlando* *fp* *pp* *stagger breathing*

167 **170**

S Oh Oo

A

T 'Neath drift-ing snow, dream fond-ly of the trees;

B 'Neath drift-ing snow, snow, trees; Oh

mfp *mfp* *pp* *all* *mp* *p*

With-in the woods ng

172 *poco a poco rit.* *mp* *mf*

S no bird's song no breeze Make won - drous

A no bird's song no breeze no bird's song no breeze Make won - drous

T no bird's song no breeze no bird's song no breeze Oh

B Oh Oo Oo Oo Oo

177 **179** **Brightening** ♩. = 66+ *mp* *mf+*

S mu - sic The king - ly sun ne-ver sends his

A mu - sic when the skies have The king - ly sun ne-ver sends his

T Ah when the skies have paled. sun ne-ver sends his

B Oo sun ne-ver sends his

181 *mf* *f* *mf*

S laugh - ing rays To wake the hills and warm the trees and streams; His face is

A laugh - ing rays To wake the hills and warm trees and streams;

T laugh - ing rays To wake the hills and warm the trees and streams;

B laugh - ing rays To wake the hills and warm the trees and streams;

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f *ff*

S hid, and hid now are the beams That woke the world on long-dead sum-mer

A hid, and hid now are the beams That woke woke woke the world world on long-dead sum-mer

T hid, and hid now are the beams That woke woke the world woke the world on sum-mer

B hid, hid, and hid now are the beams That woke the world woke the world on sum-mer

190 Poco piu mosso ♩. = 69 - 72

mp

S days. The pa - tient moon

A days. The

T days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days.

B days. Ah Ah Ah

mp

S The pa - tient moon with all her si-lent train with all her

A pa - tient moon The pa - tient moon pa - tient moon

T sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days.

B Ah Ah

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200 *mf* 201 *cresc. poco a poco*

S si - lent train Of mai - den stars² Of mai - den stars pa - trols the roads

A all her si - lent train mai - den stars Of mai - den stars pa - trols Of mai - den

T sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days. sum - mer days.

B The pa - tient moon her si - lent

204 *cresc. poco a poco* *f full*

S pa-trols the roads on high, roads on high, roads on high, And watch - es well all

A stars pa - trols the roads on high, roads on high, roads on high, And watch - es well

T sum - mer days. mai - den stars roads on high, watch - es well all things

B train Of mai - den stars And watch - es well all

209 *p* gently *mp*

S things that sleep - ing lie Till Spring's first song Till

A all things that sleep - ing lie Till Spring's first song

T that sleep - ing lie Till Spring's first song

B things sleep - ing lie

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213 ♩ = 70 - 74 (♩ = ♩.)

S *mf* Spring's first song Till Spring's first song Till Spring's first song song

A *mf* Till Spring's first song Till Spring's first song Till Spring's first song song

T *mf* Spring's first song Spring's first song Spring's first

B *mf* Till Spring's first song Till Spring's first song Till Spring's first song

219 Quiet ♩ = 72

S *ff* song shall wake-them a - gain. *half section pp* Ah a

A *ff* song song song song shall wake-them a - gain. *pp* Ah a *half section pp*

T *ff* song shall wake-them a - gain. Ah

B *ff* — song — song shall wake-them a - gain.

227 Senza Misura; L'istesso Tempo

S *mf all* Ah *n.* *) repeat 4-5 times, independently of others in section and of other sections. Stagger "exists" as shown.

A *mf* gain. Ah other half *mf all* Ah *n.* see note in Soprano

T Mm... *mf all* Ah *n.* see note in Soprano

B *all fp* Oh *mf* Ah *n.* see note in Soprano

Disappearing ♩ = 100 (♩ = 50)

243

S *p* Mm... *p* Oh *rit.* *n.*

A *p* Mm... *ppp* *pp* *n.*
sss

T *p* Mm... *n.* *pp* *n.*
sss

B *p* Mm... *ppp* *n.*