

a beautiful boy

for satb *divisi* chorus unaccompanied

by hunter t. johnson

poetry by Richard Siken

background notes:

the text for *a beautiful boy* comes from Richard Siken's *You Are Jeff*. i have never forgotten the way that i felt when i first read this poem, like someone had finally captured these crystal clear images in my head and in my heart with words. it is my hope that through this setting, i can further elaborate those feelings into music and begin to understand them.

i have met many beautiful boys in my life, but told so few of them the way that i felt.

performance notes:

this work should be performed with a great deal of flexibility and intuition.

the interactions between varying gradations of dynamic between the contrapuntal vocal lines should be thoroughly explored. key moments occur for each voice part at different times and in different ranges, just as they do in real life for each of us.

whenever time is taken to appreciate or admire some small moment, time should in turn be given back later in a frantic display of anxiety and stress seeking out a desperate sense of balance.

composer biography:

hunter t. johnson (he/him) is a dynamic young composer with a rapidly growing catalog of choral works, art songs, and chamber pieces. He takes inspiration from issues of social justice and conflict, working to give voice to sentiments and ideas that he feels are ignored in everyday life. In composing vocal works, he seeks poetry and texts that range from those that explore nature and beauty to those that examine social issues such as self-harm, suicide, and other traditionally avoided topics. He has completed commissions for art songs and choral works, including several works for Grammy Award-winning soprano Christine Brewer. Other commissioning ensembles include Emmanuel Episcopal Church and the Lindenwood University Concert Choir directed by Pamela Grooms.

An active choral musician, hunter has performed with and conducted groups in concerts across the United States. He is a co-founder and the conductor of the choral ensemble catenary. hunter's composition *Stars* was awarded the 2017 Missouri Choral Director's Association Opus Award, which recognizes an outstanding choral composition by a Missouri-based composer.

hunter is pursuing a Master's of Music Degree in Composition at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music where he has studied with Dr. Han Lash and Don Freund and holds a B.M. in Composition from Webster University, where he studied with Dr. David Werfelmann and Kim Portnoy.

for more information, works, and to contact, visit huntertjohnson.com

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for satb *divisi* chorus unaccompanied

Richard Siken

hunter t. johnson

ebbing and flowing with the text ♩ = 69

tenor i. *like the oldest prayer you know, the first folksong you learned, the first car you drove, the first "i love you" you heard*
p tender, fragile *mf* *p* *mf*

tenor ii. You're in a car with a beau - ti - ful boy. You're in a car *p* tender, fragile

bass i. You're in a car with a

bass ii.

(for rehearsal use only)

t. i. 6 *pp* tender, fragile *p* *mp*
You're in a car with a

t. ii. *mp* *mf* *p* *mp*
with a beau - ti - ful boy. You're in a car with a

b. i. *mp* *mf* *mp*
boy, a beau - ti - ful boy. You're in a car with a

b. ii.

10

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

t. i beau - ti - ful boy. You're in a car with a boy, a

mf *mp* *mf* *gentle* *mp*

t. ii beau - ti - ful boy, a boy, a boy, a beau - ti - ful boy, a

mf *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*

b. i boy, a beau - ti - ful boy, a boy, a boy, a

mp tender, fragile *mf* *mp*

b. ii You're in a car, a car with a boy, a beau - ti - ful

pp the faintest beacon of hope *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

soprano and he won't tell you that he loves you,

pp the faintest beacon of hope *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

alto and he won't tell you that he loves you,

p *desperate* *pp*

tenor beau - ti - ful boy, but he

p *desperate* *pp*

bass boy, but he

18

pure, focused
pp **p** **pp** **mp** **p**

s. he loves you, he loves you, he

pure, focused
pp **p** **pp** **mp** **p**

a. he loves you, he loves you, he

a truth so beautiful and terrible it makes you shake
p *pure, focused*
pp **p** **pp** **mp** **p**

t. loves you, he loves you, he

a truth so beautiful and terrible it makes you shake
p *pure, focused*
pp **p** **pp** **mp** **p**

b. loves you, he loves you, he

a little faster, pushing and pulling harder ♩ = 72
edgy, hardening like a protective shell around everything you love

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

s. loves you. And you feel like you've done

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

a. loves you. And you feel like you've done

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

t. loves you. And you feel like you've done

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

b. loves you. And you feel like you've done

edgy, hardening like a protective shell around everything you love

edgy, hardening like a protective shell around everything you love

edgy, hardening like a protective shell around everything you love

edgy, hardening like a protective shell around everything you love

pulled back, taking time ♩ = 63

molto rit.

27

p *mf* harsh *p* *mf* harsh *p* *mf* harsh *p* *mf* harsh

s. some-thing terr - i - ble, hollow and almost beautiful or swal-lowed pills

pp *p* *mf* harsh *p* *mp* *p* cold *pp*

a. some - thing terr - i - ble, like robbed a liq - uor store, or swal-lowed pills

p *mf* harsh *p* *mp* *p* cold *pp*

t. some-thing terr - i - ble, like robbed a liq - uor store,

p *mf* harsh *p* *mp* *p* cold *pp*

b. some-thing terr - i - ble, like robbed a liq - uor store,

3

a little faster again ♩ = 72

rit.

♩ = 63

exhausted; laboring for every stretch and inflection

31

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

s. or shov - eled your - self a grave in the dirt, and you're tired, _____

exhausted; laboring for every stretching inflection

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

a. or shov - eled your - self a grave in the dirt, and you're tired,

exhausted; laboring for every stretch and inflection

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

t. or shov - eled your - self a grave in the dirt, and you're tired, _____

exhausted; laboring for every stretch and inflection

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

b. or shov - eled your - self a grave in the dirt, and you're tired, _____

3

34 *p* *pp* like a soft, broken cry *loving; from a soft place, then rougher* *mp*

s. and you're tired. You're in a car

a. *p* *pp* *p* *loving; from a soft place, then rougher* *mp*

and you're tired. You're in a car with a

t. *p* *pp* *p* *loving; from a soft place, then rougher* *mp*

and you're tired. You're in a car with a

b. *p* *pp* *p* *loving; from a soft place, then rougher* *mp*

and you're tired. You're in a car with

rit.

38 *mf* *mp* *p* *desperate, trying to explain it all*

s. with a beau - ti - ful boy, and you're try - ing, and you're

a. *mf* *mp* *p* *desperate, trying to explain it all* *mf* *p*

beau - ti - ful boy, and you're try - ing, and you're

t. *mf* *mp* *p* *desperate, trying to explain it all* *mf* *p*

beau - ti - ful boy, and you're try - ing, and you're

b. *mf* *mp*

a boy, a beau - ti - ful boy.

42 *mp* *p* *p* desperately honest

s. try - ing not to tell him that you

a. try - ing not to tell him that you

t. try - ing not to tell him that you love

b. like saying their name to the stars on a clear november night alone *p* *mp* *p* desperately honest

a beau - ti - ful boy, you

45 *mf* *p* *pp* pure, gently intensifying *p*

s. love him, and you're

a. love him, and you're

t. him, and you're try - ing to choke down the

b. love a boy, a boy,

like saying their name to a football stadium full of people who know everything about you *mp* *mf*

caught between relentless waves of profound appreciation and bleak dejection

49

s. *mp* *mf* *mp* *mp*

try - ing, to choke down the feel - ing, the feel - ing, and you're

caught between relentless waves of profound appreciation and bleak dejection

a. *mp* *mf* *mp* *mp* *mp*

try - ing to choke down the feel - ing, the feel - ing, the feel - ing, to

t. *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

feel - ing, you're try - ing to choke down the feel - ing, to choke

b. *mp* *mf* *mp*

to choke down the

becoming caught up in the waves; their waves,

53

s. *mf* *mp* *mf* *between giddy and panicked*

try - ing to choke down the feel - ing, the feel - ing, the feel - ing, to

a. *mf* *mp* *mf* *between giddy and panicked*

choke down the feel - ing, the feel - ing, the feel - ing, the

t. *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

down the feel - ing, the feel - ing, you're try - ing to choke

his waves, her waves, your waves; like drowning

b. *mf* *f*

feel - ing, the feel - ing, the feel - ing, to choke down the

56 *f* *mf* *mp* *p*

s. choke down the feel - ing, and you're trembl - ing,

a. *f* *mf* *p* *pp* prayerful
feel - ing, to choke down the feel - ing, and you're trembl - ing, but

t. *mf* *p*
down the feel - ing and you're trembl - ing,

b. *mf* *mp* *p*
feel - ing, choke, and you're try - ing, and you're trembl - ing,

59 *pp* prayerful *mp* *p* *rit.* *p* with infinite tenderness

s. but he reach - es o - ver and he touch - es you, like a

a. *mp* *p* with infinite tenderness *p*
he reach - es o - ver and he touch - es you, like a

t. *pp* prayerful *mp* *p* with infinite tenderness *p*
but he reach - es o - ver and he touch - es you, like a

b. *pp* prayerful *mp* *p* with infinite tenderness *p*
but he reach - es o - ver and he touch - es you, like a

63 **a tempo** *mp* *p* *mp* *mf*

s. prayer for which no words ex - ist, and you feel your heart tak - ing root in your

a. prayer for which no words ex - ist, and you feel your heart tak - ing root in your

t. prayer for which no words ex - ist, and you feel your heart tak - ing root in your

b. prayer for which no words ex - ist, and you feel your heart tak - ing root in your

67 **freely** **SOPRANO SOLO** *pp* *gentle, pure, innocent; like a glassy voice cutting through the fog of a long-remembered dream*

s. like you've discovered something you don't e - ven have a name for.

GLI ALTRI SOPRANI *p* *n*

a. bod - y, *p* *n*

t. bod - y, *p* *n*

b. bod - y, *p* *n*

Tempo I

the way a bonfire and his shirt might smell the same but hurt you differently

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

s. You're in a car with a boy, a
the way a bonfire and his shirt might smell the same but hurt you differently

a. You're in a car with a boy with a boy, a
the way a bonfire and his shirt might smell the same but hurt you differently

t. You're in a car with a boy, a boy, with a boy, a
the way a bonfire and his shirt might smell the same but hurt you differently

b. You're in a car with a beau - ti - ful boy, a
the way a bonfire and his shirt might smell the same but hurt you differently

72 **mp** **p** *pure the way you hold onto a picture far, far too long; it doesn't make you feel better or worse, but it makes you feel something, and isn't that enough?*

s. beau - ti - ful boy, a boy.

a. beau - ti - ful boy, a boy, a boy, a boy. *his eyes p his words mp the knowing and not knowing p*

t. beau - ti - ful boy, a boy. *pure the way you hold onto a picture far, far too long; it doesn't make you feel better or worse, but it makes you feel something, and isn't that enough?*

b. beau - ti - ful boy, a boy, a boy, a boy. *his eyes p his words mp the knowing and not knowing p*