

Troy D. Robertson

Height in Heaven

Note from the composer:

When presented with a work that is strange or challenging, one often wonders, why this? I hope the following scraps of history will serve to elucidate my passion for these texts and something of the forces behind the genesis of this piece of music.

It may help the audience to include some simple staging, such as setting Swedenborg apart, perhaps at a lectern. The choir could start to one side and then, as they crescendo, gradually envelope Swedenborg, both musically and physically, so that he becomes lost in the ensemble before finishing his lecture.

Telling the story by inhabiting these characters is essential to the music's success.

I hope you enjoy the performance of the piece but, more than that, I hope you are lost in thought about these four people, their time, place, and circumstances, and the people around them, just as I was.

Troy D. Robertson

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was born into a deeply religious world. She spent a year in training at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Several of her poems concern religious matters. This poem, "Their height in heaven comforts not," wrestles with thoughts of heaven, but its title sounds strangely allusory. What does this strange phrase signify? It is easy to imagine what Dickinson might have meant, but one may only speculate.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was, for much of his life, a man of science. Until late in mid-life his scientific interests and expertise included subjects as disparate as anatomy and metallurgy, and his contributions to science include the earliest known conception of the neuron. Swedenborg was obsessed with explaining the connection between the material body and the soul. Having experienced dreams and visions for more than a decade, Swedenborg devoted himself entirely to religion at the age of 53. His religious works, concerned with his own revelations and his very peculiar form of exegesis, eventually disseminated throughout the world and were studied by many, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, Walt Whitman, and Abraham Lincoln.

One of his works, *Concerning Heaven and Hell*, originally published in Latin in 1758, became very popular in its English translation, which was published in 1825, such that even today it is championed by the Swedenborg Foundation of Westchester, Pennsylvania. The translation (emphasis mine) contains a peculiar and seldom used phrase. In this passage Swedenborg attempts to explain the Bible's references to measurements:

"Such is the meaning of these three dimensions, because length in heaven is from east to west, and those that dwell there are in good of love; while breadth in heaven is from south to north, and those that dwell there are in truth from good; while **height in heaven** applies to both of these in respect to degrees."

The people around Emily Dickinson in 19th century Amherst, Massachusetts, were no doubt very devout and thought often of heaven and hell. One of their forebears, William Billings (1746-1800), set a meditation on heaven by Isaac Watts (1674-1748) to music. Billings called the tune JORDAN.

Height in Heaven

Emily Dickinson
as well as texts from
Emanuel Swedenborg and Isaac Waats
adapted by R.G.

Troy D. Robertson
with quotations of
JORDAN by
William Billings

$\text{♩} = 66$ Heavily *mp*

ALTO

There is a land of pure de - light where saints im - mor - tal

BASS

There is a land of pure de - light where saints im - mor - tal

8 *mp*

In - fi - nite day ex - cludes the night and plea - sures ba - nish

reign; In - fi - nite day ex - cludes the night and plea - sures ba - nish

mp 3

In - fi - nite day ex - cludes the night and plea - sures ba - nish

reign; In - fi - nite day ex - cludes the night and plea - sures ba - nish

Emanuel Swedenborg, solo tenor or baritone, declaiming:

mf

16

I shall no-tice on - ly, on this oc - ca - sion, what is sig-ni-fied in the Word by Length,

pain. There e - ver last - ing spring a - bides and

pain. There e - ver last - ing spring a - bides and

pain. There e - ver last - ing spring a bides and

pain. There e - ver last - ing spring a bides and



22

Breadth, and Height. In the world, these are pre-di-cat-ed of things which are

ne - ver with - 'ring flow'rs. Death, like a

ne - ver with - 'ring flow'rs. Death, like a

ne - ver with - 'ring flow'rs. Death, like a

ne - ver with - 'ring flow'rs. Death, like a

27

long and broad as to space; but in heav-en, by Length is un-der stood a state of good, by
 nar - row sea, di - vides that heav'n - ly
 nar - row sea, di - vides that heav'n - ly
 nar - row sea, di - vides that heav'n ly



31

Breadth a state of truth, and by height their de-scri-m-in-a-tion ac-cord-ing to de-grees.
 land from ours. Their height in heav-en com-forts not.
 land from ours. Their height in heav'en com-forts not.
 land from ours. O
 land from ours. O

35 *mf* with renewed energy, agitated

Hence it may be seen that in heav - en, al-though there are spac - es, still noth-ing there

— Their height in heav - en com-forts not. Their height in heav - en

— Their height in heav-en com-forts not. Their height in

mf

could we make our doubts re - move, those

could we make our doubts re - move, those



39

is to be meas-ured by spac - es, but by states; con-se-quent-ly that spa- ces can - not be

— com - forts not. Their height in heav - en com - forts

heav - en com - forts not. Their height in heav - en

decresc.

gloom - - - y doubts that rise.

decresc.

gloom - - - y doubts that rise,

42

decrescendo, frantic but dying away

measured there as in this world. It necessary

not. Their height in heaven comforts not.

com - forts not. Their height in heaven com - forts

8 Their height in heav - en com - forts not. Their height in

and see the Ca - naan

mp cresc.

mp cresc.

p cresc.

mp cresc.



45

fol lows that there are gov - ern - ments in heav - en; for or - der must be ob - served, and all

— Their height in heav - en com - forts not.

not. Their height in heav - en com - forts not.

heav - en com - forts not. Their height in heav - en com - forts

that we love with un - be -

mf cresc.

mf cresc.

mf cresc.

mf cresc.

48 *rit.*

things of or - der are to be kept in-vi-o-la ble.

*a tempo
no longer heavy,
with suppleness
of rhythm*

mf cresc. Their height in heav - en com-forts not. *mf* Their height in heav -

mf cresc. Their height in heav - en com-forts not. *mf* Their height in heav -

not. Their height in heav-en com - forts not. *mf* Their height in heav -

cloud - ed eyes. *mf* Their height in heav -



53 *mp* *p*

- en com-forts not, their glo-ry nought to me; 'twas best im-per-fect as it was, I'm

- en com-forts not, their glo-ry nought to me; 'twas best im-per-fect as it was, I'm

- en com-forts not, their glo-ry nought to me; 'twas best im-per-fect as it was, I'm

- en com-forts not, their glo-ry nought to me; 'twas best im-per-fect as it was, I'm

59 *rit.* *a tempo* *mp cresc.*

fi - nite, I can't see. The house of sup - po - si - tion, the

fi - nite, I can't see. The house of sup - po - si - tion, the

8 fi - nite, I can't see. house of sup - po - si - tion,

fi - nite, I can't see. house of sup - po - si - tion,



63 *mf decresc.*

glim-mer- ing from tier, that skirts the a-cres of per - haps, to

glim-mer- ing from tier, that skirts the a-cres of per - haps, to

8 — glim-mer-ing from tier, that skirts the a-cres of per - haps, to

— glim-mer- ing from - tier, that skirts the a-cres of per - haps, to

67 *slight rit.* *piu mosso* $\text{♩} = 76$

me shows in - se - cure.

me shows in - se - cure.

me shows in - se - cure. The wealth I had con-tent-ed me; If 'twas a mean-er

me shows in - se - cure. The wealth I had con-tent-ed me; If 'twas a mean-er



72 *mf* *rit.*

then I had count-ed it un - til it pleased my nar-row eyes!

then I had count-ed it un - til it pleased my nar-row eyes!

size, then I had count-ed it un - til it pleased my nar-row eyes!

size, then I had count-ed it un - til it pleased my nar-row eyes!

77 *a tempo*

f *decresc.*

Bet-ter than lar-ger val-ues, how - e - ver true their show, how - e - ver

f *decresc.*

Bet-ter than lar-ger val-ues, how - e - ver true their show, how - e - ver

f *decresc.*

Bet-ter than lar-ger val-ues, how - e - ver true their show, how - e - ver true their show;

f *decresc.*

Bet-ter than lar-ger val-ues, how - e - ver true their show, how - e - ver true their show;



81 *rit.* *mp* *a tempo* *p*

true their show. This ti-mid life of e - vi-dence keeps plead-ing, I don't know,

mp *p*

true their show. This ti-mid life of e - vi-dence keeps plead-ing I don't know,

mp *p sempre cresc.*

This ti-mid life of e - vi-dence keeps plead-ing, I don't know, keeps

mp *p*

This ti-mid life of e - vi-dence keeps plead-ing, I don't know,

87

sempre cresc. **mp**

— keeps plead - ing I don't know, keeps

mp *sempre cresc.*

There is a land of pure de - light,

sempre cresc. **mp**

keeps plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I don't

sempre cresc. **mp**

There is a land of pure de - light, there is a land of pure de -

mp

plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I don't know, keeps

mp *sempre cresc.*

There is a land of pure de - light,

sempre cresc. **mp**

— keeps plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I don't

mp *sempre cresc.*

There is a land of pure de -

91

plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I don't know, I *mf*

there is a land of pure de - light, there is a land of pure de - light, pure de - *mf* *rit.*

know, keeps plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I *mf*

light, there is a land of pure de - light, there is a land of pure de - *mf*

plead - ing I don't know, keeps plead - ing I don't know, I *mf*

there is a land of pure de - light there is a land of pure de - light, pure de - *mf*

know, keeps plead - ing I don't know, I *mf*

light, there is a land of pure de - light, there is a land of pure de - *mf*

95 *rit.* *f* *a tempo*

don't know, — There is a land — of pure de - light, where saints im-mor-tal

light, There is a land of pure de - light, where saints im - mor - tal

don't know, — There is a land — of pure de - light, where saints im-mor-tal

light, There is a land of pure de - light, where saints im - mor - tal

don't know, — There is a land — of pure de - light, where saints im-mor-tal

light, There is a land of pure de - light, where saints im - mor - tal

don't know, — There is a land — of pure de - light, where saints im-mor-tal

light, There is a land of pure de - light, where saints im - mor - tal

a tempo

♩ = 66

rit.

100

reign; In-fi-nite day ex - cludes the night, plea-sures ba - nish pain. There is a

reign; In-fi-nite day ex - cludes the night, and plea-sures ba - nish pain. There is a

reign; In-fi-nite day ex - cludes the night, and plea-sures ba - nish pain. There is a

reign; In-fi-nite day ex - cludes the night, and plea-sures ba - nish pain. There is a

*rall. al fine*

106

decresc.

Their height in hea - ven com - forts not Their height in heav - en

There is a land of pure de - light, pure de -

land of pure de - light, Their height in hea - ven com - forts not.

land of pure de - light, Their height in hea - ven com - forts not.

109

mp *decresc. al fine*

com-forts not, com - forts not.

mp *decresc. al fine*

light, Their height in heav-en com-forts not, com - forts not.

mp *decresc. al fine*

8 Their height in heav - en com-forts not.

mp *decresc. al fine*

— Their height in heav - en com-forts not.