

Composer's note

I have always been drawn to the poetry of Christina Rossetti – her work contains a passion and a mystery that speaks to the kind of music I want to write. 'Echo' is a poem that I'd had in the back of my consciousness for some time, so when Crouch End Festival Chorus got in touch to say that they'd like me to write a piece for them, a plan started to form. The poem has one of the most beautiful, extraordinarily redolent opening lines: 'Come to me in the silence of a dream' – it is so immediately evocative, so other-worldly, and so ripe for setting to music. It feels like a poem that straddles two worlds – where the living and the dead strive to meet and touch – and Rossetti implores her lost one to 'Come back to me in dreams'.

A different kind of unreality hit during the writing of the piece. COVID-19 struck the world and suddenly I found myself writing *Echo* through the first lockdown. During this time my dad was in hospital and then a hospice – unable to receive any visitors – and the poem started to take on a new, extremely personal meaning. The words were, at times, unbearably poignant as there was such a strange intertwining, a literal echo, between the world of the poem and my own torturous days of 'watching the slow door'. But, like many artists, it was also a balm to be able to process my futile longing to see my dad. Writing *Echo* provided solace and a degree of sense at a time when my world was falling apart: the words held me and made me feel less alone. 'Speak low, lean low' became a kind of mantra on the darkest days and forms the most tender section of the piece. I wasn't able to see the magnificent, complex, funny Geoffrey Sydney Curry before he died, and I didn't get to hold his large, rough, hard-working hands, but this piece will forever be a link between those worlds of the living and the dead, and it will stand as my tribute to him.

So many of us lost loved ones to the COVID-19 pandemic so I also hope that the music will provide a small degree of solace and connection to those of us who experienced a different, traumatic, very new kind of grief; one for which there was no roadmap. Despite my profound sadness the piece has a hopeful centre which surprised me as I was writing – 'pulse for pulse and breath for breath' pushes us into a yet unwritten future with a strong, beating heart. There is life and energy and a will to carry on in the piece; but there is also the pushed-down, deep, secretly carried hope of being able to see the loved ones we lost just one more time.

Jessica Curry, December 2020

162

dreams, may live.

dreams, may live.

mp *p* *mp espress.*

dreams. My ve - ry life a -

dreams.

mp *p*

mp molto espress.

167

T. -gain, tho' cold in death: Come back to me in dreams,

mp espress.

B. cold death: back to me in dreams,

mf

354

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

- go, my love, Speak low,

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

- go, my love, Speak low,

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

my love, Speak low,

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

my love, Speak low,

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

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

mp *warm* *mf* *mp* *mf*

360

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *dolce*

lean low. Speak low, How long a -

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *dolce*

lean low. Speak low, How long a -

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

lean low. Speak low,

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

lean low. Speak low,

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *dolce*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *dolce*

mp *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *dolce*