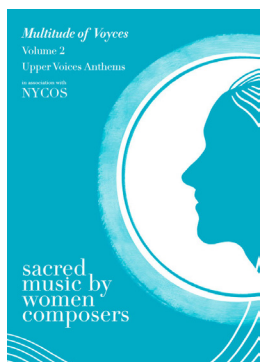


# Choral Reviews

*John C. Hughes, editor*



*Multitude of Voyces  
Sacred Music by Women  
Composers, Volume 2:  
Upper Voices Anthems*  
Louise Stewart, ed. (2020)  
SSAA, div., various  
accompaniments  
Texts: English, French,  
Latin, and Welsh

Stainer & Bell, ISBN: 9781916216419  
160 pages, £14.99, softcover

**D**riven by the mission to support under-represented groups through music, Multitude of Voyces has published its second anthology of sacred music by women composers. The aim of this series is to celebrate the contributions of women composers in church music by making their work visible and readily available for all types of choral ensembles. Volume 2 consists of twenty-four anthems exclusively for upper voices. Most songs are written for SA or SSA voicings, but the collection ranges from unison to six-part *divisi* making the anthology useful for treble choirs of all ages and abilities.

The majority of composers in this second volume are living and working today as composers and conductors in the United Kingdom where this series is published, although Italian (Carlotta Ferrari, Angelina Figus, and Bianca Maria Furgeri) and American (Linda Kachelmeier) composers are included. Amongst the sixteen contemporary composers, most are not yet familiar names to this American reviewer, making this series a much-

needed introduction to several women composers writing for upper voices today. From a historical perspective, there are eight songs including several works by Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), Clara Schumann (1819–96), Lili Boulanger (1893–1918), and Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979). One would expect a collection for treble choirs to include well-known composers such as these; however, many more gifted women have been ignored and forgotten in favor of the systematic privilege given male composers. Resources like this continue to challenge this practice by making the contributions of historical and contemporary women composers more readily accessible to those selecting music to be performed today.

As expected of an anthology for upper voices, this volume includes a diverse collection of music suitable for children and youth choirs to adults. The level of difficulty and styles range from straight-forward unison pieces to more complex works appropriate for church and concert performances. For example, Amy Bebbington's *I Sing of a Maiden* is an interesting partner song with contemporary harmonies and irregular time signatures using an ancient fifteenth-century English text that will appeal to singers young and old. Developing choirs will enjoy learning Clara Schumann's *Let Earth's Wide Circle Round*, the simple melodies of Julia Perry's *How Beautiful*

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are the Feet and Morfydd Owen's *He Prayeth Best Who Loveth Best*, and the two-part, chant-based *Ubi Caritas* by Roxanna Panufnik utilizing both Latin and English. More accomplished choirs will appreciate Rebecca Clarke's *Ave Maria* with its chromaticism and unique harmonic setting, Linda Kachelmeier's melismatic *O vis eternitatis*, the six-part sustained and luscious *Car auprès de toi* by Ninfea Cruttwell-Read, and the dissonant harmonies and intricate rhythms of Judith Bingham's *Les Saintes Maries de la Mer*.

The sacred texts included in the collection are not surprisingly comprised mostly of traditional Latin service texts (such as *Hodie Christus natus est*, *Pie Jesu* from the requiem Mass, and the Marian antiphon *Regina Caeli*) and biblical texts (including Psalm 23, Song of Solomon, and Isaiah 52:7). There are four settings of texts by the twelfth-century mystic and poet Hildegard von Bingen including Carlotta Ferrari's *Nos sumus in mundo* and *Quasi aurora*, and Hildegard's own antiphon, *O virtus Sapientie*. Julian of Norwich (1342–c.1416) is also well represented with three settings of texts from her *Revelations of Divine Love*. Conceived as companion pieces, Carol J. Jones' *All Shall be Well* with Julian of Norwich's text and Olivia Sparkhall's *Lux Aeterna* from the Requiem Mass are excellent examples of music bringing ancient texts to life as the composers have "attempted to reimagine the sounds associated with Julian's fourteenth-century voice in the twenty-first century" (Olivia Sparkhall, p. 160). Most of the songs are in English or Latin, but there are several pieces in French. Grace Williams's *Psalm 150* can be sung in English or Welsh as it was originally composed. One last interesting text to note is Joanna Forbes L'Estrange's gospel setting and adaptation of novelist Jane Austen's (1775–1817) eventide prayer: "Give us grace, Almighty Father, so to pray, as to deserve to be heard this and every day, to address thee with our hearts as we sing this with our lips."

The majority of songs in this collection are to be performed unaccompanied, but several can be

accompanied by organ and piano. Interestingly, five of the selections are written for choir with harp. This can be useful for conductors with a strong harpist available or looking to program several songs with harp accompaniment together in a single concert. The piano is indicated as an alternative to harp on four of the five songs; however, as is often the case, the harp seems to be the preferred idiom in each of these works.

There are several important resources offered in this anthology including brief biographical entries on each of the composers and commentaries on each piece. The commentaries are especially useful in understanding the background and text of each song and offer insights into the compositional approach taken by the composer. Conductors will appreciate this information as they select music and prepare for performances. Text translations are also included in the commentary section. One of the editors and contributing composers, Olivia Sparkhall, has created a useful website including YouTube performances of many of the pieces: <https://oliviasparkhall.wixsite.com/sparkhallo/single-post/2020/04/08/New-Sacred-Music-Anthology>. Because concerts were canceled or postponed in the spring of 2020 when this anthology was released, it is presumed more videos will be added once choirs can once again safely perform. A Spotify playlist of some of the recorded songs also exists [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6DSQKPdDj5sAYHdBTRxMy2?si=y2Ebb2loTpec\\_AUTfwllOQ](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6DSQKPdDj5sAYHdBTRxMy2?si=y2Ebb2loTpec_AUTfwllOQ).

This second volume of twenty-four sacred anthems for upper voices by women composers adds to the twenty-two songs included in the first volume for SATB voices. Multitude of Voyces is currently seeking submissions for its next volume to include music for the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany season for all choral voicings: <https://www.multitudeofvoyces.co.uk/>.

— Michael Zemek

Composers included in *Multitude of Voyces' Anthology of Sacred Music by Women Composers, Volume 2: Upper Voices Anthems:*

Amby Bebbington (b. 1975)  
Judith Bingham (b. 1952)  
Lili Boulanger (1893–1918)  
Hilary Campbell (b. 1983)  
Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979)  
Carlotta Ferrari (b. 1975)  
Angelina Figus (b. 1957)  
Joanna Forbes L'Estrange (b. 1971)  
Bianca Maria Furgeri (b. 1935)  
Margie Harrison (b. 1955)  
Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)  
Carol J. Jones (b. 1993)  
Linda Kachelmeier (b. 1965)  
Caroline Lesemann-Elliott (b. 1996)  
Sarah MacDonald (b. 1968)  
Gemma McGregor (b. 1965)  
Morfydd Owen (1891–1918)  
Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968)  
Julia Perry (1924–1979)  
Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)  
Ninfea Cruttwell-Read (b. 1989)  
Clara Schumann (1819–1896)  
Olivia Sparkhall (b. 1976)  
Grace Williams (1906–1977)

**Works for the Virtual Age**

Uncertainty appears to be the only certainty of the 2020–21 academic year. As we embark on new paths, questions abound: What does instruction look like? How does one lead choral ensembles when singing may be one of the most dangerous activities? How long will this go on? Information and best practices seem to change by the minute.

COVID-19 has forced musicians to be creative and innovative in many ways. As a result, genuine opportunities exist within the present challenges. I imagine many of us are putting together virtual choirs, which are satisfying

because they mimic live performance. Conductors may also consider the following works by Jocelyn Hagen, Timothy C. Takach, and Dale Trumbore, all of which were written since March specifically for virtual music making.

The pandemic is not going away anytime soon, but nothing can weaken the power and beauty of singing together. I hope you peruse these scores and wish you the best of luck navigating the challenges ahead.



**Build the Sky (2020)**

Jocelyn Hagen (b. 1980)  
and Timothy C. Takach  
(b. 1978)

3-part round

(c. 2:00)

Text by Julia Klatt Singer;  
in English

Graphite Publishing:

<https://graphitepublishing.com/product/build-the-sky/>

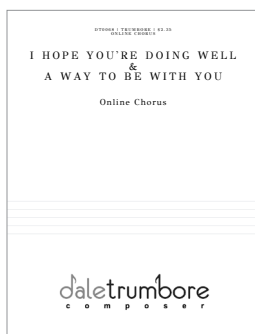
Recording by Nation (Hagen and Takach):

<https://graphitepublishing.com/product/build-the-sky/>

Jocelyn Hagen and Timothy C. Takach co-wrote this fun, folksy setting of an optimistic poem by Julia Klatt Singer. The text speaks of the special kind of togetherness that communal singing engenders: “Your voice and mine braided and bound/Here, together, all along.” Although it may not be possible for singers to be physically together, this composition affirms that distance cannot break those bonds.

It may have been tempting to write a somber piece, given the dark, uncertain times our country is enduring. On the contrary, Hagen and Takach offer an upbeat piece that is full of hope. Set in 3/4, the lilting meter and pop inflections recall the stylings of The Wailin’ Jennys, as well as Nation, the composers’ vocal band.

Because no choir is presently operating as normal—regardless of whether they meet virtually or in-person (at a distance or in reduced numbers)—Hagen and Takach wisely designed *Build the Sky* to be flexible. The piece would work well under any circumstance. It is a three-part round with an optional descant and two optional codas (one for equal voices and one for mixed voices). When rehearsals and concerts do eventually resume, conductors may consider using this piece for their first meeting. It is always important to make music as soon as possible on that first day, and a round is a great way to do so. Hagen’s and Takach’s piece allows singers of all levels to move past notes and rhythms quickly. After all this time without singing, why not get to the best part of choir right away?



*I Hope You're Doing Well & A Way to Be With You* (2020)

Dale Trumbore (b. 1987)

Online chorus; flexible voicing  
(c. 5:00)

Two movements: *I Hope You're Doing Well & A Way to Be With You*

Texts by Dale Trumbore; in English

Graphite Publishing: <https://graphitepublishing.com/product/i-hope-youre-doing-well-a-way-to-be-with-you/>

**V**irtual choirs are certainly in vogue right now, but what about pieces written intentionally to be performed in separate spaces over the internet? In March, Dale Trumbore composed two such works for “online chorus.” She also supplied the pieces’ texts, which are warm expressions of well wishes during a time of staying home and socially distant. In her performance notes, Trumbore states that conductors should also sing, which further creates a sense of unity.

Rather than fight the laws of physics that prevent multiple streams of audio transmitted over the internet from syncing, Trumbore embraces the limitations of the present reality. She leaves a great deal of discretion to performers: both movements can be performed or just one; if performing both, there is not a prescribed order; the tempo is free, and the voices do not need to be synchronous; when two pitches are notated, singers are encouraged to choose either one or move between them. The open-ended nature of these pieces works musically and offers real pedagogical benefits. Specifically, singers’ performances are not dictated by the composer or conductor. Rather, each singer’s own discretion is paramount; every choir member is empowered to play an independent, active role in the music making.

*I Hope You're Doing Well* is a sweet and sincere piece. The long, meter-less phrases recall chant and are to be intoned at each performer’s own pace with a bell-like quality. The vocal parts are mostly in unison and do not need to line up; however, there is a fermata toward the end, at which point the singers hold their note until everyone has arrived and the conductor releases. Harmonically, the piece is centered on C, which lends itself to learning on solfège. This can be hugely beneficial for students learning remotely who may not have access to a keyboard instrument. Yet, the piece is not simple. Some tricky intervals occur frequently, particularly an ascending augmented fourth from F to B and chromatic alternations of Ab and Bb. These instances add melodic interest and enough of a challenge without being insurmountable.

The other piece in this set, *A Way to Be With You*, has more elements: it is metered; frequently has more than one pitch occurring simultaneously, and has two short solo passages. The melody is hauntingly beautiful, in large part due to mode mixture. Like *I Hope You're Doing Well*, this piece centers on C, and E-flats, A-flats, and B-flats add harmonic color. Trumbore uses syncopated

rhythms to capture the text's prosody well. While *A Way to Be With You* is more complex than its partner, it is not overly difficult to learn and perform in isolation.

In these two pieces, Trumbore nails a brand new genre: music for online chorus. Prior to COVID-19, she assumedly never dreamed of

writing such pieces. *I Hope You're Doing Well* and *A Way to Be With You* avoid the potential pitfall of triteness and instead demonstrate the sincerity and craft for which Trumbore is known.

— *John C. Hughes*