

Sure On This Shining Night

for SATB Choir and piano

Text by James Agee

Dedicated to my alma mater
Pioneer High School Choirs
Ann Arbor, MI

Gabriel Movak

2013

DURATION: ca. 5 minutes and 30 seconds

INSTRUMENTATION: SATB Choir and Piano

Sure On This Shining Night by James Agee

Sure on this shining night
Of star made shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night I weep for wonder wand'ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

James Agee was an American author, journalist, and film critic, best known for his novel *A Death in the Family*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1958. His works often explored themes of poverty, family, and human dignity, with a keen eye for detail and emotional depth. Agee also made significant contributions to poetry, film criticism, and screenwriting, most notably co-writing *The African Queen*.

Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1909, Agee's writing reflects his Southern roots and empathy for ordinary lives. His collaboration with Walker Evans on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is a landmark work on poverty during the Great Depression. Agee's legacy endures for its emotional intensity and insight into human struggles.

Performance Notes

TEMPO:

When feasible, it is important that the tempi be performed as indicated in the score.

DYNAMICS:

There are character markings throughout the piece to capture the spirit of each section of music. Additionally, meticulous dynamics are provided for ease of performance, however ensembles should feel free to take liberties in pursuit of your own interpretation. In cases where there are no hairpins or dynamics marked, musicians should maintain their most recent dynamic marking indefinitely. In the rare case that a hairpin is not followed immediately by a dynamic, singers should grow or decay to the next nearest dynamic (i.e. “*f* >” would indicate a move to *mf*).

The markings “*sub.*” — or simply “*s*” — (*subito* [i.e. *sp*]) are often used when a dynamic suddenly changes.

CLEAN CUT OFF NOTATION:

Often, held notes are tied into a 16th note. These are notated to try to ensure a very clean (yet subtle) cut off on the indicated beat, rather than elongating each note by a 16th note. Additionally, the ending consonant (if applicable) is often included.

RUBATO:

Rubato is sometimes indicated and means that it is not necessary to mechanically play the exact tempo (or rhythm in the case of piano). *Rubato*, in the case of this composition, does not mean to drastically slow down the tempo, but rather ebb and flow musically.

STAGGER BREATHING / SNEAK A BREATH:

Singers should stagger breathe freely whenever necessary. When a breath is taken, please re-enter on the note from *niente* and seamlessly so that the re-entry is inaudible.

PIANO PEDALING:

If possible, all instances of notated pedal markings should be followed as written. In the absence of pedal markings, pianist should pedal musically as they see fit, given the character of the passage. *Non. ped.*, *secco*, and *staccato* are used interchangeably to indicate passages that should not be pedaled. Rests of any length above a pedal marking do *not* negate the pedal, but are rather used for rhythmic clarity.

Program Note

Dedicated to Pioneer High School Choirs | Ann Arbor, MI

The world premiere of this piece was given by Pioneer High School's A Cappella Choir

Conducted by Gabriel Novak on January 19, 2013

At the Michigan Music Conference | Grand Rapids, MI

Sure On This Shining Night was inspired by a week spent in Interlochen, Michigan, during an annual summer camp with my alma mater's choir. One night, our director brought us to the lake after light out, where the still water perfectly mirrored the stars. As we gazed up, we witnessed something extraordinary—one shooting star . . . then another . . . and another. Unbeknownst to us, we had wandered into the midst of a meteor shower. The beauty and wonder of that night stayed with me, and soon after, I wrote this piece to capture the magic of the experience.

There's a recurring motive in the piano—first heard at the opening—that plays four times throughout the piece. This figure represents a shooting star, evoking both the wonder in the sky and the awe we felt watching it. The piece is dedicated to the choirs of Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and their director, Steven Lorenz. Pioneer's A Cappella Choir premiered the work on January 19, 2013, at the Michigan Music Conference (MMC) Honors Composition Concert. It was later selected to be performed at the Michigan Youth Arts Festival Welcoming Celebration by the same ensemble, conducted by Steven Lorenz.

— Gabriel Novak

Sure On This Shining Night

for SATB Choir and Piano

Dedicated to Steven Lorenz and the Pioneer Choirs
Pioneer High School | Ann Arbor, Michigan

James Agee (1909 - 1955)

Gabriel Novak
(b.1995)

Reflective and Free (♩ = ca. 42)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Piano

quickly like a shooting star

f

mf

cresc.

Tenderly ♩ = 42

6

Sure on this night of star-made shad-ows round.

mp

mf

Sure on this night of star-made shad-ows round.

mp

mf

Sure on this night of star-made shad-ows round.

mp

mf

Sure on this night of star-made shad-ows round.

mp

mf

f

mp

pp

mp

mf

Novak: Sure On This Shining Night

12

Kind-ness must watch for me this side. the ground. transparent

f *sp* *f* *sp* *f* *sp*

f *p* *cresc.*

play B-flats with left-hand crossover

Red. *

17

$\text{♩} = 130$

sim. $\text{♩} = 130$ *mp*

23

The late year lies. The year lies down the north.

f *mp* *f* *mp*

mf *mp* *f* *mp*

29

All is healed. All is health. High sum - mer

f *mp* *f*

f *mp* *f*

f *mp* *f*

f *mp* *f*

Novak: Sure On This Shining Night

34

holds the earth. (th) Sure on this shin - ing night. Sure on this

mp *mp* *mf*

holds the earth. Sure on this shin - ing night. *mp*

holds the earth. Sure on this shin - ing night. *mp*

holds the earth. Sure on this shin - ing night. *mp*

holds the earth. Sure on this shin - ing night. *mp*

39

shin - ing night. Sure on this night. Sure on this night. Sure on this night. Sure on this night. Sure on this night.

mf *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *mp*

Sure on this shin - ing night. Sure on this night. *mf* *f* *mp*

Sure on this shin - ing night. Sure on this night. *mf* *f* *mp*

Sure on this shin - ing night. Sure on this night. *mf* *f* *mp*

44 $\text{♩} = 70$

Sure on this night. This shin - ing night.
più f mp p

Sure on this night. This shin - ing night.
più f mp p

Sure on this night. This shin - ing night.
più f mp p

Sure on this night. This shin - ing night.
più f mp p

$\text{♩} = 70$ *f p* Slow and Free

Rubato $\text{♩} = 52$ **rit.** **A Tempo**

49 Sure this shin - ing night. On this
mp

Sure, sure on this this shi - ning
 Sure this shin - ing night. On this
mp

Sure, sure on this shin - ing night. On this
mp

Sure this shin - ing night.
mp

Sure this shin - ing night.
mp

Rubato $\text{♩} = 52$ **rit.** **A Tempo**

mp

53

shin - ing night. (t) This side the ground. On this shin - ing night of star - made shad - ows

shin - ing night. (t) This side the ground. On this shin - ing night of star - made shad - ows

Shin - ing night. (t) Side the ground. Shin - ing night of star - made shad - ows

Shin - ing night. (t) Side the ground. Shin - ing night of star - made shad - ows

58

$\text{♩} = 80$ **poco rit.**

round. All is healed. Hearts all whole.

round. All is healed. Hearts all whole.

round. All is healed. Hearts all whole.

round. All is healed. Hearts all whole.

sim. $\text{♩} = 80$ **poco rit.**