

THE GHOST SONG

Seán Doherty

2017

Soprano Solo

SATB div. a cappella

TEXT

‘The singers and workers that never handled the air’
—Gwendolyn Brooks

From a dream of summer, of absinthe,
I woke to winter. Carol singers
decked the halls of some long-lost homeland.
Late-night shoppers and drowsy workers
headed for the train.

So the night that
you died was two-faced, June light never
far from mind though snow fell. I handled
grief like molten sunshine, learned to breathe
your high lithe ghost song from thinnest air.

Paula Meehan

PROGRAMME NOTE

Meehan’s meditation on death uses an extraordinary metaphor: to grieve is like learning a song. The dead sing quietly. We inhale their songs from the air and find their meaning only gradually. A mere fragment from the poem’s final sentence is set to music: I (...), learned to breathe your (...) ghost song (...). These seven words are again fragmented into four phrases: I learned your song, I breathe your ghost, I learned to breathe, I breathe song. The mourner teaches the melody in phrases. These phrases are pieced together until the full phrase is heard. This new understanding heralds the true song in a full-blooded climax. When this subsides, we hear that the mourner has learned the words to the Ghost Song.

Performance Time: *c.* 4 mins

The Ghost Song

With the kind permission of poet Paula Meehan and Dedalus Press,
commissioned for the Bealtaine 2017 Festival by Age and Opportunity,
with the support of The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Association of Irish Choirs

Paula Meehan

Seán Doherty

Adagio ♩ = 60

Soprano Solo

ah _____ ah _____

inhale (nose) ← exhale (mouth) →

Soprano

ppp pppp sim. p

hahh→ I hahh→ I

inhale (nose) ← exhale (mouth) →

Alto

ppp pppp sim. p

hahh→ I hahh→ I

inhale (nose) ← exhale (mouth) →

Tenor

ppp pppp sim. p

hahh→ I hahh→ I

inhale (nose) ← exhale (mouth) →

Bass

ppp pppp sim. p

hahh→ I hahh→ I

inhale (nose) ← exhale (mouth) →

5

S. Solo

ah _____ ah _____

S.

learned your _____ song, hahh→ I breathe your

A.

learned your _____ song, hahh→ I breathe your

T.

learned your _____ song, hahh→ I breathe your

B.

learned your _____ song, hahh→ I breathe your

9

S. Solo *f* *mp* *p*

ah_____ ah_____

S. ghost, *hahh*→ I learned to breathe, I breathe_____

A. ghost, *hahh*→ I learned to breathe, I breathe_____

T. ghost, *hahh*→ I learned to breathe, I breathe_____

B. ghost, *hahh*→ I learned to breathe, I breathe_____

13

S. — song. I learned your_____ song, I breathe your ghost, I

A. — song. (ng) I learned your_____ song,

T. — song. (ng) I

B. — song. (ng)

18

S. learned to breathe,_____ I breathe_____ song.

A. I breathe your ghost, I learned to breathe,_____

T. learned your_____ song, I breathe your ghost, I

B. I learned your_____ song,

22

S. *hahh hahh hahh hahh hahh*

A. I breathe_____ song. *hahh hahh hahh*

T. learned to breathe,_____ I breathe_____ song. *hahh*

B. I breathe your ghost, I learned to breathe,_____ I breathe_____

accel. $\text{♩} = 80$

27

S. Solo *pp* *p* *gliss.*
ng oo wh→ayee

S. I *p* *gliss.*
ng oo wh→ayee

S. II *hahh hahh oo wh→ayee*

A. I *hahh hahh oo wh→ayee*

A. II *hahh hahh oo wh→ayee*

T. I *hahh hahh oo→ wh→ayee*

T. II *hahh hahh oo→ wh→ayee*

B. _____ song. *hahh hahh wh→ayee*

tutti
ff

31

S. I
learned to breathe your ghost song, your ghost song, your ghost song, your

S. II
I learned to breathe_____

A. I
I I learned to breathe your ghost song, your

A. II
I I learned

T. I
learned to breathe_____ your ghost song.

T. II
learned_____ to breathe your ghost song, I

B.
(I) learned to breathe

==

35

S. I
ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your

S. II
your ghost song.

A. I
ghost song, your ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe your

A. II
to breathe_____ your

T. I
I learned to breathe_____

T. II
learned to breathe your ghost song, I learned

B.
your ghost song, your ghost song,

39

S. I
ghost song, your ghost song, your

S. II
I learned

A. I
ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your

A. II
ghost song. I learned to breathe your

T. I
— your

T. II
to breathe

B.
I learned

==

41

S. I
ghost song. I

S. II
to breathe

A. I
ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your ghost song. I

A. II
ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your

T. I
ghost song. I learned to breathe your

T. II
— your

B.
to breathe

43

S. I
learned to breathe your ghost song, I

S. II
— your

A. I
learned to breathe your ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe your

A. II
ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your ghost song. I

T. I
ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song, your

T. II
ghost song. I learned to

B.
your ghost song,

45

S. I
learned to breathe your ghost song, *fff*

S. II
ghost song. *fff*

A. I
ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to breathe *fff*

A. II
learned to breathe your ghost song, your ghost song. I learned to *fff*

T. I
ghost song. I learned to breathe your ghost song. *fff*

T. II
breathe your ghost song, your ghost song. *fff*

B.
your ghost song, *fff*

47 *mp molto rubato*

S. Solo I learned your— song, I breathe your ghost, I

*ppp sub.**

S. I ah

*ppp sub.**

S. II ah

*ppp sub.**

A. I ah

*ppp sub.**

A. II ah

ppp sub.

T. ah

ppp sub.

B. ah

rit.

52

S. Solo learned to breathe, hahhh your ghost song.

inhale close eyes *exhale open eyes* *morendo p*

S.

A.

T.

B.

*cue-sized notes: some singers gently undulate between these notes for duration of held chord, independent tempi