

CAROL BARNETT
THE MYSTIC TRUMPETER

for divisi Chorus and Trumpet

Text by Walt Whitman

Commissioned for the Dale Warland Singers 25th Anniversary,
by Meet the Composer and the Readers Digest Consortium Commission:

Gregg Smith Singers

Ars Nova Singers
Tom Morgan, conductor

New Classic Singers
Lee Kesselman, conductor

Premiered May 10th, 1997 by the Dale Warland Singers
with David Baldwin, trumpet
at Ted Mann Concert Hall,
Minneapolis, MN

c. 12 minutes

PROGRAM NOTE:

I never really appreciated Walt Whitman's poetry – too much O this and O that. And yet, I am occasionally captivated by its evocative, incantatory quality, and in 1997 found myself setting a rather large chunk of *The Mystic Trumpeter*, happy to find so many opportunities for word painting, which I love to do. More than that, I tried to capture the poetic spirit of Whitman himself: a big, bold American Romantic who loved the voluptuous sound of words and whose poetry rumbles on at length through whole lists of subjects. Consequently, the music is not all that refined; it takes what it needs from various styles and tosses them all together, going from one to another quickly, without graceful transitions. It is not only a setting of the poetry, but a portrait of the poet.

THE MYSTIC TRUMPETER

Hark, some wild trumpeter, some strange musician,
Hovering unseen in air, vibrates capricious tunes to-night.

I hear thee trumpeter, listening alert I catch thy notes,
Now pouring, whirling like a tempest round me,
Now low, subdued, now in the distance lost.

.....
Blow trumpeter free and clear, I follow thee,
While at thy liquid prelude, glad, serene,
The fretting world, the streets, the noisy hours of day withdraw,
A holy calm descends like dew upon me,

.....
Thy song expands my numb'd imbonded spirit, thou freest, launchest me,
Floating and basking upon heaven's lake.

.....
Blow again trumpeter! and for thy theme,
Take now the enclosing theme of all, the solvent and the setting,
Love, that is pulse of all, the sustenance and the pang,

.....
Love, that is all the earth to lovers--love, that mocks time and space,
Love that is day and night--love, that is sun and moon and stars,
Love that is crimson, sumptuous, sick with perfume,
No other words but words of love, no other thought but love.

Blow again trumpeter--conjure war's alarums.

Swift to thy spell a shuddering hum like distant thunder rolls,
Lo, where the arm'd men hasten--lo, mid the clouds of dust the glint of bayonets,
I see the grime-faced cannoneers, I mark the rosy flash amid the smoke, I hear the
 cracking of the guns;
Nor war alone--thy fearful music-song, wild prayer, brings every sight of fear,
The deeds of ruthless brigands, rapine, murder--I hear the cries for help!

.....
And now thy sullen notes send darkness through me,
Thou takest away all cheering light, all hope,
I see the enslaved, the overthrown, the hurt, the opprest of the whole earth,
I feel the measureless shame and humiliation of my race, it becomes all mine,
Mine too the revenges of humanity, the wrongs of ages, baffled feuds and hatreds,
Utter defeat upon me weighs--all lost--the foe victorious,
(Yet 'mid the ruins Pride colossal stands unshaken to the last,
Endurance, resolution to the last.)

Now trumpeter for thy close,
Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,

Sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith and hope,
Rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of the future,
Give me for once its prophecy and joy.

O glad, exulting, culminating song!
A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes,
Hymns to the universal God from universal man--all joy!
War, sorrow, suffering gone--the rank earth purged--nothing but joy left!
The ocean fill'd with joy--the atmosphere all joy!
Joy! joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in the ecstasy of life!
Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!
Joy! joy! all over joy!

Walt Whitman