Commissioned for "A Community that Sings!"
North Central American Choral Directors Association

Premiered March 4, 2010
at the North Central American Choral Directors Association Conference
at Orchestra Hall, Minneapolis, MN

PROGRAM NOTE:

The original *Camptown Races* was first published by Stephen Foster (widely considered the father of American music or popular music) in 1850, who specifically tailored it for use in blackface minstrel shows, a disconcertingly popular form of entertainment in which white performers painted their faces brown and imitated what they thought of as Black mannerisms, culture, and behavior. In Foster's case, these depictions were almost entirely fantasy; most sources say that Foster had only been to the South once in his later life. Nevertheless, Foster found commercial success only with his musical depictions of the South. His songs depict African-American slaves with a strange mix of condescension, mockery, and affection, reflecting a white society solidifying and reinforcing the idea of race in the time leading up to the civil war. Most modern performances of Foster's work use modified lyrics and no performance should be given without including the historical context of the music.

Surprisingly, this particular song was probably not set in the South at all; Camptown was a town near Foster's home in Pennsylvania. The "dialect" of the original lyrics, however, still suggest that Foster is portraying the speaker as African-American.

CAMPTOWN RACES (modernized lyrics) – Stephen Foster

The Camptown ladies sing this song.
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
The Camptown racetrack five miles long.
Oh, doo-dah day!

I went down there with my hat caved in,
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
I come back home with a pocket full o' tin.
Oh, de doo-dah day!

refrain:
Gonna run all night.
Gonna run all day.
I bet my money on the bob-tailed nag,
Somebody bet on the bay.

Oh, the long-tailed filly and the big black hoss,

For more information about this piece and other music by Carol Barnett visit www.carolbarnett.net.

Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
They come to a mud hole, they all cut across.
Oh, doo-dah day!

The blind hoss stickin' in a big mud hole,
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
'E can't touch bottom with a ten-foot pole.
Oh, de doo-dah day!

refrain

Oh, the old muley cow come on the track,
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
The bob-tail fling her over his back.
Oh, doo-dah day
!
They fly along like a railroad car.
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
They runnin'a race with a shootin' star.
Oh, de doo-dah day!

refrain

Oh, I win my money on the bob-tailed nag.
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
I keep my money in an old tow bag.
Oh, doo-dah day!
Y' see them hosses round the bend,
Doo-dah! Doo-dah!
I guess that race'll never end.
Oh, de doo-dah day!

refrain

This arrangement of *Camptown Races* was written for the 2009 Conference of the North Central American Choral Directors Association, a contribution to their songbook entitled *A Community That Sings!* which aims to breathe new life into the waning tradition of singing folk songs together. The deceptively simple requirements turned out to be unexpectedly challenging: "not complicated, interesting, musical, singable as a unison piece, optional harmony, optional obbligato instrument, relatively short…" I took them to mean an arrangement that could be sung anywhere, without an accompanying keyboard instrument, hence the "Rules of the Game:"

- singers are divided into Leaders and Group
- Group members can become Leaders as soon as they feel comfortable doing so
- there are optional two- and four-part settings for the later verses and choruses