

Nicholas Ryan Kelly

The Oxen

*for mixed choir (SATB)
and piano*

Not for printing or performance

The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
 "Now they are all on their knees,"
 An elder said as we sat in a flock
 By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
 They dwelt in their strawy pen,
 Nor did it occur to one of us there
 To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
 In these years! Yet, I feel,
 If someone said on Christmas Eve,
 "Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
 Our childhood used to know,"
 I should go with him in the gloom,
 Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928)

Thomas Hardy's poem "The Oxen" refers to a dubious myth from the poet's childhood. According to this myth, animals would kneel in their stables at midnight on Christmas Eve, echoing the behaviour of their counterparts in the nativity story.

This story's truthfulness is obviously doubtful--so the poet's nostalgia for it is a wonderful way to explore themes of hope and doubt. The poem also celebrates the magic of childhood Christmases while acknowledging the complex emotions we often feel as adults at this time of year.

Since I believe music has unparalleled potential to explore different (often contradictory) emotions at once, this poem seemed to cry out for a musical setting--and I hope you enjoy bringing its many layers to life.

NRK

The Oxen

for mixed choir (SATB) and piano

words by
Thomas Hardy

music by
Nicholas Ryan Kelly

Moderato con moto
♩ = 104

naïvely
p

SOPRANO
Christ-mas Eve and twelve of the clock.

ALTO

Moderato con moto
♩ = 104

Piano
p

Red. * *Red.* * *sim.*
(*Red. harmonically*)

6

pp *mp*

"Now they are all on their knees," an el-der said as we sat in a

pp *mp* *p*

"Now they are all on their knees,"

11 *p*

flock by the em - bers in hearth -

by the em - bers in hearth -

16 *poco rit.* **A** *A Tempo*

side ease. We

side ease. We

poco rit. **A** *A Tempo*

dim. *p*

pic - tured the meek mild crea - tures

pic - tured the meek mild crea - tures

pp Mm *mp* meek mild

pp Mm *mp* meek mild

where they dwelt in their

where they dwelt in their

crea - - tures ah *p*

crea - - tures ah *p*

31 *mp* *p*
 straw - y pen.
 straw - y pen.
 in their straw - - y
 in their straw - - y

36 **B** *mp* *cresc.* *f*
 Nor did it oc - cur to one of us there to doubt
 Nor did it oc - cur to one of us there to doubt
 pen, to doubt
 pen, to doubt

B *mp* *più cresc.* *f* *decresc.*

41

decresc.

p

7

they were kneel - ing then.

decresc.

p

they were kneel - ing then.

mf

mp *decresc.*

they were kneel - - ing

mf

46

pp

then.

mp

p

cresc. poco a poco

51

Musical score for measures 51-55. The score is in 4/4 time and features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measures 51-55 contain piano accompaniment with various melodic lines and chords. A large watermark 'Not for printing or performance' is overlaid diagonally across the page.

56

Musical score for measures 56-60. The score is in 4/4 time and features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. Measures 56-60 contain vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The vocal lines are marked with dynamics such as *sorrowful mf* and *mf*. The piano accompaniment includes a section marked *ff sub. p*. A large watermark 'Not for printing or performance' is overlaid diagonally across the page.

58

C

fair a fan - cy few would weave in

fair a fan - cy few would weave in

fair a fan - cy few would weave

fair a fan - cy few would weave

C

f *mf*

60

these years, in these years!

these years, in these years!

in these years, in

in these years, in

f *mf*

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63

So fair a fan - cy few would weave in
 So fair a fan - cy few would weave in
 these years! Fair a fan - cy few would weave
 these years!

66

these years, in these years!
 these years, in these years!
 in these years, in
 in these years, in

(C)

69

f **D**

Yet I feel if some - one said on
 Yet I feel if some - one said on
 these years! Yet I feel if some - one said on
 these years! Yet I feel if some - one said on

f **D**

poco rit. ----- **Meno mosso e rubato**
più f *sub. p*

72

Christ - mas Eve "Come; see the
 Christ - mas Eve "Come; see the
 Christ - mas Eve "Come; see the
 Christ - mas Eve "Come; see the

più f *sub. p*
più f *sub. p*
più f *sub. p*
più f *sub. p*

ff

(8)-----

75 *reverently* **pp** **E** Poco più mosso *cresc.*

ox - en kneel, in the lone - ly bar - ton

ox - en kneel, in the lone - ly bar - ton

ox - en kneel, in the lone - ly bar - ton

ox - en kneel, in the lone - ly bar - ton

una corda *gently!* **E** Poco più mosso *tre corde*

gliss. (black keys) *p*

* 8^{va}

80 *(cresc.)* *mf* *accel. poco a poco*

by yon - der coomb our child - hood used to know,"

by yon - der coomb our child - hood used to know,"

by yon - der coomb our child - hood used to know,"

by yon - der coomb our child - hood used to know,"

mf *accel. 8^{va}* *pp* (L.H.)

(8)... loco

pp

mp

F Tempo I
♩ = 104

I would go
I would go
I would go
I would go

loco
brightening
mp
mf (R.H.)

with him in the gloom, hop - ing it
with him in the gloom, hop - ing it
with him in the gloom, *mp* *più decres.*
with him in the gloom, *mp* *più decres.*

93

might be so, *p* hop - ing it might be

might be so, *p* hop - ing it

p

p

decresc.

G

98

so, *rit. poco a poco* hop - ing it might

might be so, hop - ing it might

pp hop - ing it might be so, *p*

pp hop - ing it might be so, *p*

rit.

103

Meno mosso e rubato

pp

Musical score for measures 103-105. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have lyrics 'be so.' and 'so.' with long melisma lines. The piano part includes a section for the left hand (L.H.) with a *pp* dynamic marking. The score includes time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 and back to 4/4.

106

Musical score for measures 106-108. It features four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts have long melisma lines. The piano part includes a section for the right hand (R.H.) with a *pp* dynamic marking and a *8va* marking. The score includes time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 and back to 4/4.