

Nicholas Ryan Kelly

# The Oxen

*for mixed choir (SATB)  
and piano*

## 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*)

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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* *p*

side ease. We

side ease. We

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

*dim.*

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

crea - - tures ah

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

51

56

sorrowful  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So

*ff* *sub. p*

va

56

sorrowful  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So  
*mf*

So

*ff* *sub. p*

va



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

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

*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

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*

*pp* (black keys) *gliss.* *p* \* 8<sup>va</sup>

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<sup>va</sup>* *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*

*decresc.* *p* **G**

98

*rit. poco a poco*

so, hop - ing it might

might be so, hop - ing it might

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

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

*rit.*

103

Meno mosso e rubato

*pp*

Four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics "be so." and "so." under the notes. The music is in 4/4 time, with a 3/4 time signature change at measure 104. The dynamics are *pp*.

Meno mosso e rubato

*pp*

Piano accompaniment for measures 103-105. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents. The left hand has a bass line with slurs. The dynamics are *pp*. A "(L.H.)" marking is present in measure 104. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at measure 104.

106

Vocal staves and piano accompaniment for measures 106-108. The vocal staves show long notes with slurs. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A "gru" marking is present in measure 107. The time signature is 4/4.