

When I was asked to write the commissioned anthem for the 20th anniversary of TCDA (Texas Choral Directors Association), I knew that the piece would be sung first to music teachers and I wanted to encourage them in their work and remind them of how important they are to the lives of our young people.

When I was in Junior High school, I had a wonderful teacher who created a sanctuary for her students in the choir room. She opened many windows of artistic thought that were new to me, and she helped me fall in love with choral music. I wasn't much of a singer and so played the piano for the group (my degrees are in piano performance). It was a violent time in the inner city school where I was bused everyday and music became a deeply important part of my life for many reasons during those years. This dear teacher, Doris Clark, had a special nurturing spirit and her kind but disciplined manner was both an inspiration and a challenge for us to do our best. She was energetic and insightful. She connected the dots of musical expression and

the greater lessons of life in a way I had never considered. She also inspired a great sense of the sacred in the music and that was a tremendous impact on me and how I was to view my musical gifts through the years. She was one of my first true mentors.

In a tragic turn of events, following one of our concerts my final year she was brutally murdered in the choir room. We returned to a music suite surrounded by police tape and padlocks. That wondrous place that had been such a special sanctuary for us was turned in an instant into reminder of the hatred and violence that was part of that awful time. “The Awakening” is my journey back to joy... it is my testament to the power of music to heal and the determination that we all discovered while trying to honor the life-song of our beloved teacher.

The piece lays out into three sections. The first section is a dream sequence...or should I say a nightmare, where there is only silence

and despair. Music of course is also a metaphor for life in the anthem, and I tried to write the piece so that even non-musicians might be able to relate to the feelings of hopelessness that are represented in this opening tableau. The music is replete with tone painting, and as this section settles into deep despair, all melody is smothered and this haunting section ends with just gasping whispers of silence.

The middle section is representative of the coming of dawn and the hope of a new day. The song, no longer dormant, emerges from the shadows and begins to shine. The whole of creation begins to sing in a festive ostinato and confident calls to praise are heard from each section. The hidden message of “Soli Deo Gloria” harkens back to the works of Bach (he often wrote these words at the ends of his music) and celebrates my personal conviction that the source of the “Song” is divine.

This spiritual admonition transports the piece headlong into the Finale which is a hymn of praise to the “Giver of the Song.” The final

shouts of exaltation banish the darkness of the opening dream forever with the proclamation "Let Music Live! Hopefully, both performer and listener will understand through the journey of the piece that they are part of the sacred song of life. I also hope that teachers and music directors will rediscover the joy of sharing the gift of music with their pupils and that they will feel encouraged even as my teachers encouraged me to celebrate that song in everything they say and do.

Let Music Live!

Joseph Martin