

moongazing

SATB divisi a cappella

text by Nigel Phillips (b. 1934)

music by Sheena Phillips

In this piece inspired by the moon, each bar represents one day. The moon, represented by the wordless singers, waxes from bar 1 (new moon) thru bar 14 (full moon), then wanes from bar 15 thru bar 28 (new moon), and then waxes and wanes again through one more cycle.

At the new moon, we hear just one glancing harmony – just as we would see only a sliver of moon in the sky. Gradually, more notes and wider intervals are introduced (always centering on F, for Phoebe, the moon), culminating in an F# minor seventh chord at the full moon.

The wordless accompanying parts move in very simple intervals and create shifting harmonies, over which the semichorus sings the words of the poem, chantlike and meditatively. I have not marked breaths but the wordless parts may breathe after each phrase – as quickly as possible, to maintain a feeling of continuity.

Optional staging: place the wordless choir (moon) in an arc, everyone facing stage left. Over the course of 14 bars, the singers slowly turn, one at a time, from the stage left end to the stage right end, to face out to the audience. At bar 15 (full moon), all singers will be facing outwards. Then, in the same order (stage left to stage right), the singers turn back to face stage left again, until at the new moon everyone is as they were at the start. This adds a visual element to the portrayal of the moon's cycle. The semichorus can be ranged behind the audience, or in front of the wordless choir, facing the audience, or to one side at stage front, gazing at the moon.

duration c. 4:15

perusal score – not for rehearsal or performance

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moongazing

When I peruse your pocked and cratered face
Billions of years after the accident,
The cosmic crash that gave you violent birth,
Then I reflect how short and transient
Is life for me, for all the human race
And every living thing on Planet Earth.
If you were not a senseless rocky ball,
You would consider it a lot of fun
That men revered you as a deity,
God or goddess, and sibling of the sun.
But you would think the funniest thing of all
Blaming the moon for men's insanity.
Nightly reminder of life's brevity,
Phoebe, shine on for all eternity!

Nigel Phillips

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moongazing

Nigel Phillips

Sheena Phillips

In this piece, each bar represents one day. The moon, portrayed by the wordless singers (H, M1, M2, HL, LL), waxes from bar 1 (new moon) thru bar 14 (full moon), then wanes from bar 15 thru bar 28 (new moon), and then waxes and wanes again through one more cycle.

The wordless 'moon voices' move in very simple intervals and create shifting harmonies, over which a separate semichorus sings the words of the poem, chantlike and meditatively. I have not marked breaths but the 'moon voices' may breathe after each phrase (as marked by slurs) – as quickly as possible, to maintain a feeling of continuity.

At the new moon, we hear just one glancing harmony – just as we would see only a sliver of moon in the sky. Gradually, more notes and wider intervals are introduced (always centering on F, for Phoebe, the moon), culminating in an F# minor seventh chord at the full moon.

All lines can be sung by any mixed or equal voices, except for line HL which should only be sung at the written pitch - either by lower women's voices or higher men's voices. The semichorus should be large or strong enough to be heard over the other voices.

Staging

Place the 'moon voices' in an arc, everyone facing stage left. Over the course of 14 bars, the singers slowly turn, one at a time, from the stage left end to the stage right end, to face out to the audience. At bar 15 (full moon), all singers will be facing outwards. Then, in the same order (stage left to stage right), the singers turn back to face stage left again, until at the new moon everyone is as they were at the start. This adds a visual element (and also a secondary auditory aspect) to the portrayal of the moon's cycle. The semichorus can be ranged behind the audience (my preferred option), or in front of the wordless choir, facing the audience, or to one side at stage front, moon-gazing.

Adagio misterioso ♩ = 54

High
Medium 1
Medium 2
High men /
Low women
(written pitch only)
Low
Semichorus

When I per-use your pocked and cra-tered face

moongazing 2

[half moon]

5

H *mp* *mp* ah,

M1 *mp* ah,

M2 ah,

HL *p* *mp* ah, ah,

L *p* *mp* ah, ah,

SC *mf* 3 3 3 > >

Bil-lions of years af-ter the ac-ci-dent, The cos-mic crash that gave you vio-lent birth,

9

H *p subito* ooh, ooh,

M1 *p subito* ooh, ooh,

M2 *p subito* ooh, ooh,

HL *p subito* ooh, ooh,

L *p subito* ooh, ooh,

SC *mp dolce* 3 3

Then I re-lect how short and tran-si-ent Is life for me, for all the hu-man race And

perusal score - not for rehearsal or performance

moongazing 3

A [full moon]

13

H ah, *f* ah, *dim.*

M1 ah, *f* ah, *dim.*

M2 ah, *f* ah, *dim.*

HL ah, *f* ah, *dim.*

L ah, *f* ah, *dim.*

SC *f*
ev - 'ry liv - ing thing on Pla - net Earth.

17

H nn, *mp* ooh,

M1 nn, *mp* ooh,

M2 nn, *mp* ooh,

HL nn, *mp* ooh,

L nn, *mp* ooh,

SC *mf* 3 3
If you were not a sense-less rock-y ball, You would con-si-der it a lot of fun

moongazing 4

20

[half moon] *p*

H ah, ooh,

M1 ah, ooh,

M2 ah, ooh, *p* stagger breathing

HL ah, ooh,

L ah, ooh,

SC That men re - vered you as a de - i - ty, God or god - dess, and

25

B [new moon] *pp* *pp*

H nn, nn,

M1 nn, nn,

M2 nn,

HL nn,

L nn,

SC sib-ling of the sun.

moongazing 5

31 *cresc.* *p* *cresc.*

H ah,

M1 *cresc.* *p* *cresc.* ah,

M2 *p* *cresc.* ah,

HL *pp* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.* ah,

L *pp* *cresc.* *p* *cresc.* ah,

SC *mp* *cresc.* *mf* 3 ah,

But you would think the fun-niest thing of all Bla-ming the moon for

34 *mf* [half moon]

H ah,

M1 *mf* ah,

M2 *mf* ah,

HL *mf* ah,

L *mf* ah,

SC man's in - sa - ni - ty.

moongazing 6

37 *p*

H ooh, ah,

M1 ooh, ah,

M2 ooh, ah,

HL ooh, ah,

L ooh, ah,

SC *mp* 3 3

Night-ly re-mind-er of life's bre-vi-ty, Pho-e-be, shine,
(pronounced fee-bee)

C [full moon]

41 *mf* *f*

H ah, ah, nn, shine,

M1 *mf* *f* ah, ah, nn, shine,

M2 *mf* *f* ah, ah, nn, shine,

HL *mf* *f* ah, ah, nn, shine,

L *mf* *f* ah, ah, nn, shine,

SC *f* 3 *f*

shine on for all e - ter-ni-ty! Pho-e-be, shine,

moongazing 7

47 *mf dim.* [half moon] *mp*

H ah, shine,

M1 ah, shine,

M2 ah, shine,

HL ah, shine,

L ah, shine,

SC shine on for all e - ter-ni-ty! Phoe-be, shine, Phoe-be,

f

53 *p* join the 'n' of 'shine' to the 'nn' *niente*

H shine, nn... *niente*

M1 shine, nn... *niente*

M2 shine, nn... *niente*

HL shine, nn... *niente*

L shine, nn... *niente*

SC *mf* *mp sempre* shine, shine on for all e - ter-ni-ty!

3

staging: 'moon singers' turn to face audience again in silence over 15 seconds or so after bar 56 - in sequence as before