

moongazing

mixed or equal voices a cappella in six parts (flexibly scored)

text by Nigel Phillips (b. 1934)

music by Sheena Phillips

In this piece inspired by the moon, each bar represents one day. The moon, portrayed by wordless harmonies, waxes gradually from new moon to full moon, then wanes, and waxes and wanes again through one more cycle. Over this shifting background, a semichorus sings in unison, chantlike, the reflective words of Nigel Phillips' poem.

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, one of the ancient names for the moon). It was a delightful discovery that one of the chords that lies symmetrically around the note F is F# minor seven. Bright yet subdued, it marks the full moon.

The piece can be implemented as SSATB-semichorus (with T singing the actual pitches of line 4 by transposing up an octave, and B singing an octave below the written pitches of line 5) but will also work with mixed voices on each (or any) line.

Some optional staging is suggested for choirs that would like to give a physical representation of the waxing and waning moon at the same time as singing.

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

mixed or equal voices a cappella

Words by Nigel Phillips

Music by Sheena Phillips

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.

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 altos or by tenors (transposing up an octave). Any other line taken by men's voices should be sung an octave below the written pitch. The semichorus should be large or strong enough to be heard over the other voices.

I have not marked breaths but singers of the five wordless lines may breathe between syllables – as quickly as possible, to maintain a feeling of continuity.

Optional staging

The 'moon voices' stand 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 an 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

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six staves. The top five staves are for wordless voices, and the bottom staff is for the semichorus. The wordless voices are labeled 'High', 'Medium 1', 'Medium 2', 'High men / Low women (written pitch only)', and 'Low'. The semichorus staff is labeled 'Semichorus'. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of 'Adagio misterioso ♩ = 54'. The wordless voices sing the syllable 'nn,'. The semichorus sings the words 'When I per-use your pocked and cra-tered face'. The score includes dynamic markings of *pp* and *p*, and a triplet of eighth notes in the semichorus staff.

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

moongazing 2

[half moon]

5

mp *mp*

H
ah,

M1
ah,

M2
ah,

HL
p *mp*
ah, ah,

L
p *mp*
ah, ah,

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

9

p subito *p subito* *p subito* *p subito*

H
ooh, ooh,

M1
ooh, ooh,

M2
ooh, ooh,

HL
ooh, ooh,

L
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 4

20

[half moon] *p*

H ah, ooh,

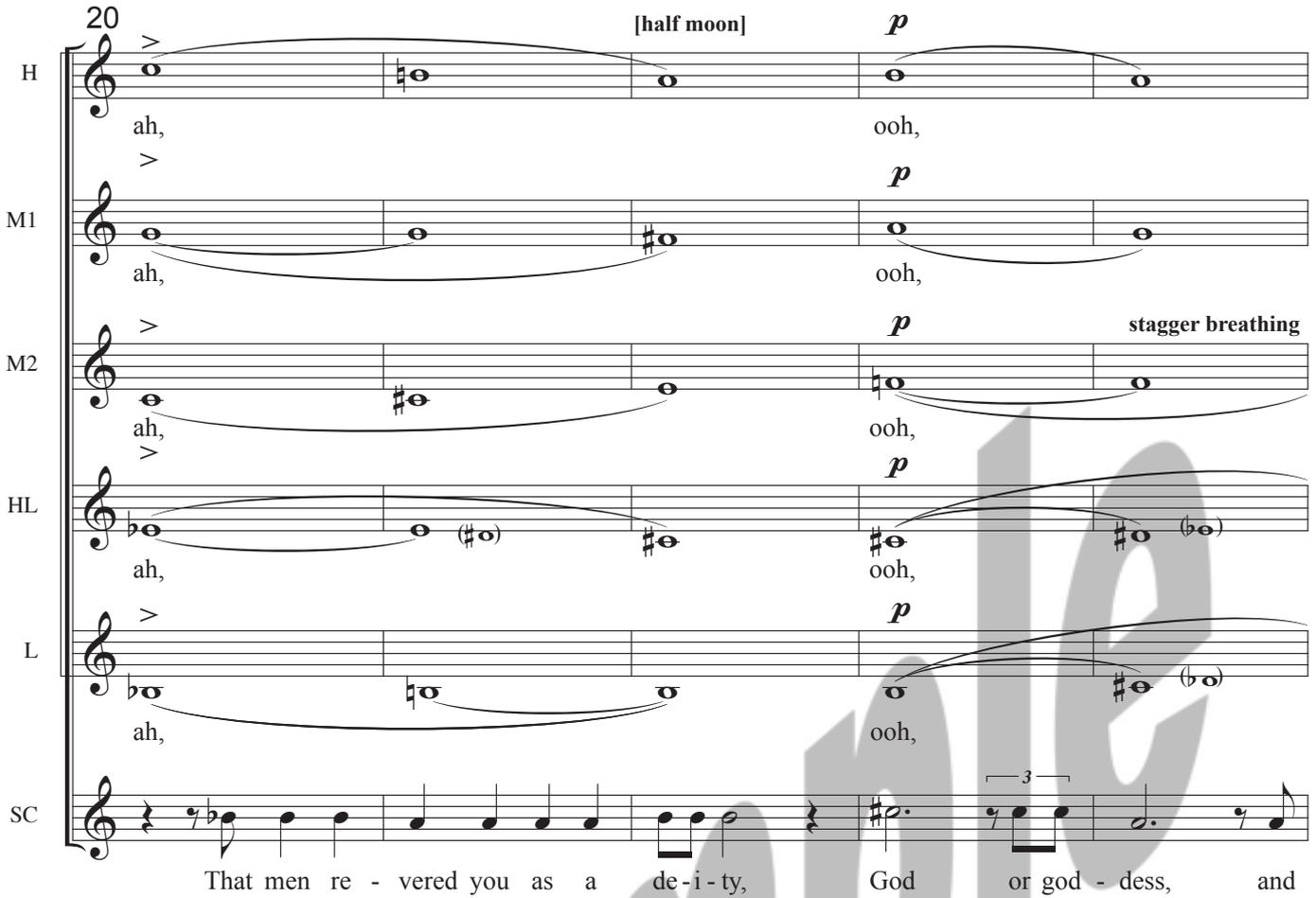
M1 ah, ooh,

M2 ah, ooh, *p* stagger breathing

HL ah, ooh, *p*

L ah, ooh, *p*

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.

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, Phoe-be, shine,
(pronounced fee-bee)

C [full moon]

41 *mf* *f*

H ah, ah, nn, shine,

M1 *mf* *f*

M2 *mf* *f*

HL *mf* *f*

L *mf* *f*

SC *f* 3

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

moongazing 7

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

H ah, shine,

M1 *mf dim.* *mp*
ah, shine,

M2 *mf dim.* *mp*
ah, shine,

HL *mf dim.* *mp*
ah, shine,

L *mf dim.* *mp*
ah, shine,

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

53 *p* join the 'n' of 'shine' to the 'nn' *niente* [new moon]

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!

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