

# “All Quiet Along the Potomac”

words by Ethel Lynn Beers (1827 – 1879)

music by Sheena Phillips

for women's chorus (SSAA), piano and optional percussion  
(castanets, wood block, drum set)

Beers' poem satirizes a news report following one of the battles of the Civil War, which described the situation (stereotypically) as “all quiet”. A small addendum mentioned the death of a single picket (a soldier on watch, usually outside the main camp). Beers brings back to life the unfortunate picket, and portrays the great loss sustained by him and his family, even if it was only a small incident in the context of the war as a whole. The poem was first published in *Harper's Weekly* on November 30, 1861.

The piece also incorporates the chorus of the song *John Brown's Body*, a popular marching song on the Union side during the Civil War.

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## “All quiet along the Potomac”

"All quiet along the Potomac," they say,  
"Except now and then a stray picket  
Is shot, as he walks on his beat, to and fro,  
By a rifleman hid in the thicket.

'T is nothing—a private or two, now and then,  
Will not count in the news of the battle;  
Not an officer lost—only one of the men,  
Moaning out, all alone, the death rattle."

All quiet along the Potomac tonight,  
Where the soldiers lie peacefully dreaming;  
Their tents in the rays of the clear autumn moon,  
Or the light of the watch-fires, are gleaming.

There's only the sound of the lone sentry's tread  
As he tramps from the rock to the fountain,  
And he thinks of the two in the low trundle-bed,  
Far away in the cot on the mountain.

His musket falls slack; his face, dark and grim,  
Grows gentle with memories tender,  
As he mutters a prayer for the children asleep,  
For their mother, may Heaven defend her!

The moon seems to shine just as brightly as then,  
That night when the love yet unspoken  
Leaped up to his lips: when low, murmured vows  
Were pledged to be ever unbroken;

Then drawing his sleeve roughly over his eyes,  
He dashes off tears that are welling,  
And gathers his gun closer up to its place,  
So to keep down the heart that is swelling.

Now he passes the fountain, the blasted pine tree,  
The footstep is lagging and weary;  
Yet onward he goes, through the broad belt of light,  
Toward the shade of the forest so dreary.

Hark! was it the night wind that rustled the leaves?  
Was it moonlight so wondrously flashing?  
It looked like a rifle—"Ha! Mary, good-by!"  
And the life-blood is ebbing and plashing.

All quiet along the Potomac to-night,  
No sound save the rush of the river;  
While soft falls the dew on the face of the dead.  
The picket's off duty forever.

Ethel Lynn Beers (slightly adapted from the original)

The piece also incorporates the chorus of the popular marching song *John Brown's Body*

# "All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight"

Ethel Lynn Beers

Sheena Phillips

• = 132

S *mp* *mock nonchalantly*

"All qui-et a - long the Po - to-mac," they

perc hi-hat

bass drum *p*

*mock jauntily*

*mp*

8

S *mf* *mp*

say, "Ex-cept now and then a stray pick-et is shot, as he walks on his

perc snare drum

*f* *p*

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line (S) starting with a tempo marking of quarter note = 132. The vocal line is marked *mp* and *mock nonchalantly*. The percussion line (perc) includes hi-hat and bass drum parts, with the bass drum marked *p*. The piano accompaniment (piano) is marked *mp* and *mock jauntily*. The second system begins at measure 8. The vocal line continues with a crescendo leading to *mf* and then *mp*. The percussion line features a snare drum part with dynamics *f* and *p*. The piano accompaniment continues with the same *mp* dynamic.

all quiet along the potomac 2

14

S *mf*  
beat, to and fro, By a ri - fle-man hid in the thick-et. 'Tis

A *mf*  
'Tis

perc.

20

S  
noth-ing... a pri - vate or two, now and then, will not count in the news of the

A  
noth-ing... a pri - vate or two, now and then, will not count in the news of the

perc. *mp*

all quiet along the potomac 3

26

S  
bat-tle. Not an of - fi - cer lost! On-ly one of the men, moan-ing out, all a -

A  
bat-tle. Not an of - fi - cer lost! On-ly one of the men, moan-ing out, all a -

perc.

32

S  
lone, the death rat-tle."

A  
lone, the death rat-tle."

perc.

castanets

*mp*

all quiet along the potomac 4

39 *mf* *mock jauntily*

S  
Glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-

A  
Glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-lu - jah, glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le-

perc. *mf*

*mf*

44 *mp*

S  
lu - jah and his soul goes march-ing on. All qui-et a - long the Po-

A  
lu - jah and his soul goes march-ing on. ah,

perc.

*p* *leggiero*

all quiet along the potomac 5

50

S  
to - mac to - night, where the sol-diers lie peace-ful-ly dream-ing; their\_\_

A  
ah

56

S  
tents in the rays of the clear au-tumn moon or the light of the watch-fires are

A

all quiet along the potomac 6

62 *mf*

S gleam-ing. There's on-ly the sound of the lone sen-try's tread as he

A *p marcato*  
left, right, left, right,

perc. *mp*

68 *p*

S tramps from the rock to the foun-tain, and he thinks of the two in the

A *p unis.*  
left, right, left, right, and he thinks of the two in the

perc. *leggiero*

74

S  
low trun-dle - bed, far a - way in the cot on the moun-tain.

A  
low trun-dle - bed, far a - way in the cot on the moun-tain.

perc.

81

*mp*  
S  
His mus-ket falls slack; his face, dark and grim, grows

*mp*  
A  
His mus-ket falls slack; his face, dark and grim, grows

*p*

87 *mf*

S gen-tle with me-mor-ies ten-der, as he mut-ters a prayer\_\_\_\_\_ for the

A gen-tle with me-mor-ies ten-der, as he mut-ters a prayer\_\_\_\_\_ for the



94 *mp*

S chil-dren a - sleep, for their moth-er, may Heav-en de - fend her!

A chil-dren a - sleep, for their moth-er, may Heav-en de - fend her!



101 *mf in reverie*

S The moon seems to shine \_\_\_\_\_ just as brightl-y as then,

add A1 as needed *mf in reverie*

S2 The moon seems to shine \_\_\_\_\_ just as brightl-y as then,

A *mf in reverie*

A The moon seems to shine \_\_\_\_\_ just as brightl-y as then,

*mf*

107

S that\_\_ night when the love yet un - spo - ken leaped up to his

S2 that\_\_ night when the love yet un - spo - ken leaped up to his

A that\_\_ night when the love yet un - spo - ken leaped up to his

*mf*

112

S *mp*  
lips: oh,

S2 *mp*  
lips: when low, mur-mured vows were pledged to be ev - er un - bro-ken.

A *mp*  
lips: when low, mur-mured vows were pledged to be ev - er un - bro-ken.

118

S *mf* getting back to the present  
Then draw - ing his

A *p*  
Glo-ry, glo-ry hal-le

perc. *p*

*mp*

124

S sleeve rough - ly o - ver his eyes, he dash - es off tears that are

A lu - jah, glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah,

perc.

129

S well - ing, and gath - ers his gun clo - ser up to its place, so to

A glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah, glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah,

perc.

The musical score is written for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Percussion (perc.), and Piano. It is in a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The first system begins at measure 124. The Soprano part has the lyrics 'sleeve rough - ly o - ver his eyes, he dash - es off tears that are'. The Alto part has the lyrics 'lu - jah, glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah,'. The Percussion part features a steady rhythmic pattern. The Piano accompaniment consists of a simple harmonic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system begins at measure 129. The Soprano part has the lyrics 'well - ing, and gath - ers his gun clo - ser up to its place, so to'. The Alto part has the lyrics 'glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah, glo - ry, glo - ry hal - le - lu - jah,'. The Percussion part continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The Piano accompaniment continues with the same harmonic structure.

134

S  
keep down the heart that is swell - ing.

S2

A  
and his soul goes march - ing on. *p* Now he

perc.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 134 through 137. It features five staves: Soprano (S), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto (A), Percussion (perc.), and Piano. The Soprano part has the lyrics 'keep down the heart that is swell - ing.' The Alto part has the lyrics 'and his soul goes march - ing on. Now he'. The piano accompaniment includes a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present above the Alto staff.

138

A  
pass - es the foun - tain, the blast - ed pine tree, the foot - step is lag - ging and

*p*

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measure 138. It features two staves: Alto (A) and Piano. The Alto part has the lyrics 'pass - es the foun - tain, the blast - ed pine tree, the foot - step is lag - ging and'. The piano accompaniment includes a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present below the piano staff.

all quiet along the potomac 13

144

*p*

S oh,

*mf*

S2 yet on - ward he goes, through the broad belt of light, t'ward the

*p*

A wea - ry; oh,

perc.

*mf*

149

S one or two people rustle  
some leaves of paper

S2 shade of the for - est so drea - ry.

*solo* *recitativo*  
(anxious and rushed)

A Hark! was it the

perc.

*p*

The musical score is arranged in a standard format with five systems. The first system (measures 144-148) features Soprano (S), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto (A), Percussion (perc.), and Piano accompaniment. Dynamics include *p* and *mf*. The second system (measures 149-153) continues the vocal parts and piano accompaniment, with a *solo* marking for the Alto part and *recitativo (anxious and rushed)* instructions. The piano part ends with a *p* dynamic. A large watermark 'samol' is overlaid diagonally across the page.

155

*lunga*

A

night wind that rust-led the leaves? Was it moon-light so won-drous-ly

*lunga 8<sup>va</sup>*

*f*

160

S

S2

A

flash-ing? It\_ looked like a ri-fle.... "Ha! Ma-ry, good - bye!"

*slow f*

*f*

*tutti f*

perc.

woodblock

snare drum

*f*

*(8<sup>va</sup>)*

166 *tempo primo*  
*mp*

S  
ah!

*mf*  
S2  
And the life - blood is eb - bing and plash - ing.

*mp*  
A  
ah!

*mp*  
*p*

172  
*p*

S  
ooh,

*mp*  
A  
All qui - et a - long the Po - to - mac to - night, no

perc.  
*p*

*leggiero*

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system (measures 166-171) features three vocal staves (S, S2, A), a piano accompaniment, and a percussion part. The second system (measures 172-177) continues with the same instruments. The piano part includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *p*, and the word *leggiero* is written above the piano staff in the second system. The percussion part is marked *p*. The vocal parts have lyrics and dynamic markings: S (ah!), S2 (And the life - blood is eb - bing and plash - ing.), and A (ah!).

179

S

A

perc.

sound save the rush of the riv - er; while soft falls the dew on the

185

S

A

perc.

*mf*

The pick-et's off du-ty

face of the dead. *mf* The pick-et's off du-ty

190 *mp*

S  
for - ev - er.

A  
*mp*  
for - ev - er.



195 *mp*

*mf*

♩ = 96 *rall.*

