

Program notes to “My Chapel on the Hill”

By Pierre Miller

This piece is about the memories which help us through troubled times. In searching for a text to set with the music, I reflected upon my life and my own childhood; I realized that as I grew older, when life threw more and more at me, I found myself coming back to memories of a very special tree I saw when I was a child. It was a citrus tree that grew oranges, lemons and grapefruits on one and the same branch. I traveled there often with my mother, and throughout my life, memories of those visits retain a certain magic for me. The annual bell song spoken of in this work is a metaphor for all of the memories of happy moments we carry.

In the first stanza, the speaker acquaints us with his current disconsolate situation. There, we first hear of his memories of looking forward to hearing the bell song.

(As the speaker is singing about a bell song, this is actually metamusic, music *about* music, and as such, I tried to bring the diegetic focus away from the text and toward the antiphonal bell responses by limiting the melodic diversity of the setting.)

The second stanza tells of the speaker's triumph over his circumstances and his eventual rise to success at what he views as the expense of his sensitivity. However, a pervading sense of emptiness forces his thoughts to return to memories of bell song. The handbells sound in response.

The final stanza informs us of the reason for the speaker's dolor. He reiterates the personal importance of the bell song, and, underscoring this work being metamusic, for the first time, the speaker speaks in the present tense with regard to the bells, plaintively pleading for their final return.