



Gwyneth Walker

Purer than Purest Pure

a Christmas Anthem

for SATB Chorus divisi

Purer than Purest Pure

duration: 3 minutes 15 seconds

premiered by the Harvard University Choir
Edward Elwyn Jones, Choirmaster
Memorial Church at Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts
December 10, 2023

Purer than Purest Pure

puer than purest pure
whisper of a whisper

so(big with innocence)
forgivingly a once
of eager glory,no
more miracle may grow

–childfully serious
flower of holiness

a pilgrim from beyond
the future's future;and
immediate like some
newly remembered dream–

flaming a coolly bell
touches most mere until

(eternally)with(now)
luminous the shadow
of love himself:who's we
–nor can you die or i

and every world,before
silence begins a star

– E. E. Cummings

O Jesu Sweet

O Jesu sweet, O Jesu mild,
born in love's image, undefiled,
light in our hearts your holy flame,
that we may know wonders in your
name.

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, Jesu...
a star, a star, a star, a star...
a pilgrim from afar.

from the hymn text "O Jesulein Sass"
by Samuel Scheidt(1587-1654)
adapted by Gwyneth Walker

Notes

This poem by E. E. Cummings creates several images which specifically inspire the musical setting. The opening phrases speak of *purity*— a *pure* child, a child of innocence. Thus, the music starts on “middle C,” in the *pure* key of C Major. The sparseness of pitches from the voices offer *purity* of sound.

The choir then *bounces* on the words *childfully serious* (perhaps a contradiction unto itself!).

A favorite image of the composer is a *pilgrim from beyond the future's future*. Here, the child (the Christ Child) is seen as coming to earth from afar – from the Father in Heaven, or, in 21st-century reference, as a space traveler.

Thus, as the poem closes with the words and *every world, before silence begins a star*, we are reminded of the Heavenly distance from which the child/pilgrim is traveling.

This reverence of the child extends into a version (lyrics adapted by composer) of the familiar hymn, “O Jesu Sweet.” The connection to the Cummings’ poem comes in the common imagery of *a holy flame*, and in the closing lines *a star, a star, a star... a pilgrim from afar*.

The Composer

Widely performed throughout the country, the music of American composer **Gwyneth Walker** is beloved by performers and audiences alike for its energy, beauty, reverence, drama, and humor. Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont before returning to live in her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at:

www.gwynethwalker.com

Music preparation by:

TUNESMITH MUSIC

PO Box 91435 | Louisville KY 40291 | (502)762-9219

www.tunesmithmusic.com | info@tunesmithmusic.com

for the Memorial Church at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts,
 the 114th Annual Christmas Carol Services, and the Harvard University Choir,
 Edward Elwyn Jones, Gund University Organist and Choirmaster

Purer than Purest Pure

a Christmas Anthem

for SATB Chorus divisi unaccompanied

E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)

Gwyneth Walker

“O Jesu Sweet”

Traditional, G. W. alt.

Slowly, peacefully (♩ = 80)

S1 *pp* pure

S2 *pp*

A **Slightly faster** (♩ = 100) *p*

Soprano
 pure _____ pur - er than pur - est

Alto
 pure _____ pur - er than pur - est

Tenor
pp
 pure pure pure pure

Bass
pp
 pure pure _____ pure _____ pur - er than pur - est

Slowly, peacefully (♩ = 80)
opt. keyboard support

A **Slightly faster** (♩ = 100)

Piano
pp
 ped. _____ simile

“purer than purest pure”. Copyright 1950, © 1978, 1991 by the Trustees for the E. E. Cummings Trust.
 Copyright © 1979 by George James Firmage, from COMPLETE POEMS: 1904-1962 by E. E. Cummings,
 edited by George J. Firmage. Used by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

6

pure whis-per of a whis - per so so (big with in - no - cence)_

pure whis-per of a whis - per so so (big with in - no - cence)_

p pure_ so_ so (big with in - no - cence)_

pure whis-per of a whis - per so so (big with in - no - cence)_ *unis.*

10

cresc. poco a poco

— for - giv-ing - ly a once of ea - ger glo - ry, glo -

cresc. poco a poco

— for - giv-ing - ly a once of ea - ger glo - ry, glo -

cresc. poco a poco

— for - giv-ing - ly a once of ea - ger glo - ry, glo -

cresc. poco a poco

— for - giv-ing - ly a once of ea - ger glo - ry, glo -

cresc. poco a poco

14 *rit.* ***f***, **Moderate tempo** (♩ = 88) *rit.*

p

f, *p* *unis.*

f, *p*

f, *p* *unis.*

rit. **Moderate tempo** (♩ = 88) *rit.*

ry, no more mir - a - cle may grow _____

ry, no more mir - a - cle may grow _____

ry, grow _____

ry, Ah, grow _____

[B] Lively, playfully (♩ = 108)

18 *S1 mf* *+S2*

child - ful - ly, child - ful - ly, child - ful - ly se - rious flower of ho - li - ness, _____

mf

flower of ho - li - ness, _____

mf

flower of ho - li - ness, _____

mf

flower of ho - li - ness, _____

[B] Lively, playfully (♩ = 108)

mf

22 *Soli p* *Tutti mf* *unis.*

ah, a pil - grim from be - yond, from be - yond the fu - ture's

Solo p *Tutti mf*

ah, a pil - grim from be - yond, from be - yond the fu - ture's

Solo p *Tutti mf*

ah, be - yond

Solo p *Tutti mf*

ah, a pil - grim from be - yond, from be - yond the fu - ture's

mf

26 *rit.* C *recited on pitch, unison rhythm*
(*p*) *magical*

fu - ture; ah and immedate like some newly remembered dream -
(*p*) *magical*

fu - ture; ah and immedate like some newly remembered dream -
(*p*) *magical*

fu - ture; ah and immedate like some newly remembered dream -
(*p*) *magical*

fu - ture; ah and immedate like some newly remembered dream -
(*p*) *magical*

rit. C

rit.

Red.

With motion (♩ = 108)

30 *unis. (p)* *pp background*

dream

(p) *pp background*

dream

pp *mf*

mm flam - ing a cool - ly bell

pp *unis. mf*

mm flam - ing a cool - ly bell

With motion (♩ = 108)

mf

mf

(*And.*)

D

34 *S1 p* *+S2 (p)*

touch-es most mere un - til, un - til, un - til (e - ter - nal - ly,

Al p

un - til, un - til (e - ter - nal - ly,

mm

mm

D

p

38

rit. *f* *unis.* *p* * **Slowly**

e - ter - nal - ly) with (now, now, now, now) Ah

(A1) +A2 (*p*) *f* *unis.* *p*

e - ter - nal - ly) with (now, now, now, now) Ah

p *f* *unis.* *p*

(e - ter - nal - ly) with (now, now, now, now) Ah

p *f* *unis.* *p*

with (now, now, now, now) Ah

rit. *f* *unis.* *p* **Slowly**

with (now, now, now, now) Ah

p *f* *unis.* *p*

E With reverence (♩ = 92)

lu - mi - nous the shad - ow of love him - self: who's we - nor can you die or

lu - mi - nous the shad - ow of love him - self: who's we - nor can you die or

lu - mi - nous the shad - ow of love him - self: who's we - nor can you die or

lu - mi - nous the shad - ow of love him - self: who's we - nor can you die or

E With reverence (♩ = 92)

*Chorus may rest in m. 41 if keyboard plays.

46 *mf*

i and ev'ry world, before silence

mf

i and ev'ry world, before silence

mf *p sub.*

i and ev'ry world, before silence be - gins a

mf

i and ev'ry world, before silence

49 **F** Quickly (♩ = 120)

(unpitched vowel)
like a star exploding into light
Al *p* sss -

p

star,

unis. p

star,

F Quickly (♩ = 120)

p

Red. Red.

61

born in love's im - age, un - de - filed,
 born in love's im - age, un - de - filed,
 star,
 star,

65 **H** *p* *cresc. poco a poco*

light in our hearts your ho - ly flame, that
 light in our hearts your ho - ly flame, that
 light in our hearts your ho - ly flame, that
 light in our hearts your ho - ly flame, that

H

69

we may know wonders in your name.

we may know wonders in your name.

we may know wonders in your name.

we may know wonders in your name.

73 **I** With building excitement (still ♩ = 120) *p lightly*

Je - su, Je - su... a

Je - su, Je - su, Je - su, Je - su... a

Je - su, Je - su, Je - su, Je - su...

Je - su, Je - su. Je - su. Je - su...

I With building excitement (still ♩ = 120)

Red. simile

77 *cresc. poco a poco*

star, a star, a star, a star, a star, a star, a

cresc. poco a poco

star, a star, a star, a star, a star, a star, a

(light head tone)

cresc.

cresc. poco a poco a star. . .

a star, a star, a star, a star, a star, a star,

S^{va}

cresc. poco a poco

Red.

80 *rit. to end* *f*

star, a star, a pil - grim from a - far.

star, a star, a pil - grim from a - far.

a pil - grim from a - far.

a star, a star, a pil - grim from a - far.

rit. to end

(*S^{va}*)

f

poco

(*Red.*)