

## **3 New Hampshire Songs**

**mixed choir  
16 parts**

- I. Litany (R.S.A. 161:2, IV)**
- II. Proposition (3 verbs and a logical operator)**
- III. Doggerel (four voice canon #12)**

**Larry Polansky  
1999**

### 3 New Hampshire Songs

The 3 *New Hampshire Songs* are based on (mostly) indigenous New Hampshire texts. My family and I have lived in New Hampshire for close to 10 years now, and these pieces are a kind of meditation on home.

Each is dedicated to fellow New Hampshirites who have enriched our lives in this remarkable, interesting, and contradictory state. I often say that much of American music (at least my own) is about place. These pieces are explicitly about the possibilities of place, dedicated to others who see those possibilities in new ways.

Each song is based on a text, emblematic of our state in some way. The Shaker "abcdarius" is not originally from New Hampshire (nor is it actually a Shaker text), but Shaker culture and music (through Shaker music expert Mary Ann Haagen and our friends in the Shaker family at Sabbathday Lake) have wonderfully permeated our lives in recent years, and I wanted to set this text to music (as have many others). Whether it is one of the most beautiful or nonsensical of American poems ("angleworm dog"?), it is used here with the deepest affection and respect for the culture and music it represents. The subtitle was inspired by my brother, Steven Polansky, a writer, who once told me, after I played him a recording of the Seeger family singing this poem, that he often used it to teach his poetry class, as an example of "pure doggerel"

*Proposition* takes its text from our famous licentious slogan, in all its potential for confusion.

*Litany* is an unedited setting of the text of a form which, by law, until a few months ago, prospective adoptive families were made to sign. My wife and I, with great discomfort, signed this document. One couple we know (Kate Soule and John McDermott), also signed it. After the law was repealed they asked for their copy back and ceremoniously burned it. Similarly, this piece is my response.

All three songs use only pitches derived from the first 17 harmonics of a fundamental: D for *Proposition*, E for *Doggerel*, and F for *Litany*. The pieces should all be sung in the intonation of the harmonic series, as follows (using the series on D as a prototype):

Harmonic #	Pitch ( <i>Proposition</i> )	Pitch ( <i>Doggerel, Litany</i> )	Cents Deviation
1, 2, 4, 8, 16	D	(E, F)	0¢
3, 6, 12	A	(B, C)	+2¢
5, 10	F#	(G#, A)	-14¢
9	E	(F#, G)	+4¢
15	C#	(D#, E)	-12¢
7, 14	C	(D, Eb)	-31¢
11	Ab	(Bb, B)	-49¢
13	Bb	(C, Db)	+41¢
17	D#	(F, F#)	+5¢

These pieces were premiered by the York Vocal Index, York, England, under the direction of William Brooks, in June, 2003. I am grateful for a number of suggestions made by those musicians which have been incorporated into the score. In that performance, the fundamental of all pieces was made the same (A), and in *Proposition*, separate clicktracks (through headphones) were given to each performer.

Larry Polansky  
 Lebanon, Fall, 1999  
 (rev. 8/20/03)

**I. Litany (R.S.A. 161:2, IV)  
for Walter and Liz Sinnott-Armstrong**

For 16 or more voices. In Section I, each voice sings only one pitch, designated by the first "measure" (not sung) in which the 16 harmonic pitches are distributed for the 16 voices. The singers should divide up these pitches according to their most comfortable range. In Section I, each voice (except the lowest) moves gradually from an indefinitely tuned pitch somewhere close the target pitch (x-noteheads) to the target pitch (ordinary notehead). A slight crescendo (almost an accent) should accompany the arrival on the target pitch. All lyrics are in unison. Vibrato should be little or not at all. In general, definite pitches should be a dynamic level or two louder than indefinite pitches. The idea is of a noisy harmonic series gradually refining itself.

In Section II, a continuous, monophonic melody should "move through" the choir as indicated in the score. Singers should join in, unobtrusively, when they can sing a pitch, and some simple mechanism should be devised by the singers so that the legato effect indicated in the score is achieved (perhaps by physical position in the choir). Higher voices may begin a bit lower to ensure greater clarity of words.

Section III should be sung by those who can sing the notes (the designation "men" and "women" is for convenience only).

There can be a slight pause between each section. Care should be taken throughout to make the words as clearly understood as possible.

All tunings are based on the harmonic series on F (see chart in introduction).

## II. Proposition (3 verbs and a logical operator) for Jack and Ann Wilson

For nine or more voices. Each voice sings only one pitch. Although voices are designated soprano, alto, tenor, bass, they may be sung by anyone who can sing the one pitch in the part. There may be more than one singer to a part, but the nine parts should be of roughly equal loudness.

The "quarter note" is used throughout as a common pulse, and all grupetti relate to it. Thus, *all* grupetti (even the small ones, like 7, 5, 3, and 2) are  $n$  quarters in the time of 8 quarters (for the measure). Stems and grupetti brackets are dropped after a few measures in each part. The only exception is the low bass part (D), which is always a whole note, or two per measure (with the first whole note rest omitted in the last few measures).

When each voice has been reduced to one note, that note is the "middle" of the grupetto. Although this is rhythmically difficult, care should be taken that the natural, superparticular accelerando up the harmonic series is observed. In other words, 13 is closer, rhythmically to 12 than 12 is to 11, and so on. All these pitches come after the middle of the measure.

All notes are more or less legato, held almost to the next note or rest.

All tunings are based on the harmonic series on D (see chart in introduction).

### III. Doggerel (four voice canon #12) for Mary Ann Haagen and Charlie DePuy

Each part consists of four pitches from the harmonic series on E (2-16). The piece may be sung in one of two ways:

- in hoquet fashion (one voice to a note, for a total of 16 voices)
- the entire section singing all of the pitches in the part

As in I. and II., pitches are tuned to the harmonic series (this time on E). Pitches may be distributed among the voices in the most comfortable way. For example, since the bass and tenor parts are a bit high (owing to the natural spacing of the harmonic series), altos may sing the top tenor note(s), tenors, the top bass note.

The score consists of four individual parts, sung at four different tempi, related as 7:6:5:4. In other words, if the bass part (the longest) is sung at mm. 60, the tenor, alto, and soprano parts are at mm. 75, 90, and 105, respectively. A system of synchronized click tracks may be used, or better, individual conductors who are part of the choir. The conductors conduct 5 against 4, 6 against 4, and 7 against 4 with reference to the conductor of the bass part.

All parts should end precisely together. Tenor, alto and sopranos parts start successively later in the bass part, proportionate to their tempo. In other words, since the tenor part's tempo is 5/4ths of the bass part, it begins on beat 22. The alto and soprano parts begin on beats 36 and 46 of the bass part, respectively.

A tempo between mm. 50 and 60 is suggested for the bass part. At mm. 60, the bass part lasts 1:45, tenor 1:30, alto 1:40, and soprano 1:00. The tenor, alto and soprano parts lasts 84, 70, and 60 beats of the bass part, respectively.

Upper case words should be accented slightly. All tunings are based on the harmonic series on E (see chart in introduction). Depending on the specific ranges and strengths of the singers, the fundamental for the entire piece may be moved up or down (putting the entire work in a different "key").

(Thanks to William Brooks for the first performance of the piece, and for valuable assistance with the score).