

Paul STEENHUISEN - PROGRAM NOTES

PIECE: TWO RIVERS

The initial inspiration for this piece was the choral music of my former composition teacher, Dr. Stephen Chatman. The piece begins in the conservative tonal language found in much of his choral music, but through the addition of clashing tones, becomes non-tonal. Throughout the work one can hear a smooth movement between these seemingly disparate approaches, and at times the traditional textures co-exist with the more chaotic ones. Overall, however, there is a gradual transformation from a clearly contrapuntal area to one of aleatoric sound blocks. In tandem with the transformation of musical style, the text also reflects the change. The simple and straightforward text of the opening becomes distorted via backwards text and word-plays, as well as the fracturing of words and the presentation of only tributary consonants or vowels from previously sung text. These transformations continue until the final ad libitum “block”, where the choir shouts rusalia, the name ascribed to the russian river nymphs whose vernal rites are to make the waters safe for swimming and spread the rivers over the fields to ensure an ample harvest.

First performed by the UBC Chamber Singers, conducted by Cortland Hultberg.