

# Because

A Setting of Sonnet XXXIX from the Portuguese  
by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

For Unaccompanied Mixed Chorus (SATB)

By Mark Zuckerman

1999

Duration: ca. 6'

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## About the Music

I wrote **Because** in honor of my wife, Judith, on our first wedding anniversary. I presented it to her with the help of the Gregg Smith Singers at their summer workshop in Saranac Lake, New York, close after the actual event.

This piece continues what I hope will be a tradition begun at our wedding, for which I wrote **Grow Old Along With Me**, a choral setting of poetry by Robert Browning. **Because** sets the poetry of Robert's wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

**Because** is heavily influenced by the music of Lili Boulanger – in particular her Psalm settings – which captures with great sensitivity and dramatic awareness every nuance of the text.

## About the Text

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote her forty-four *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in secret, presenting them to her husband Robert in 1847. Although she never meant them to be published, she was, fortunately, persuaded to put them in print.

According to Louis Untermeyer (the editor of *The Love Poems of Elizabeth and Robert Browning*, currently published by Barnes and Noble):

The title was something of a mystery; it was a modest, and misleading, attempt to conceal the unimpeded confessions of an impassioned heart. The poems were obviously not translations; the title was merely one more token of domestic intimacy. At first Mrs. Browning suggested "Sonnets translated from the Bosnian." But the title finally chosen was another homage to Browning; it was an acknowledgment of her husband's playful way of calling her his "own little Portuguese" because of her olive skin.

This is the text of Sonnet XXXIX:

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace  
To look through and behind this mask of me  
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly  
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,  
The dim and weary witness of life's race,--  
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,  
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,  
The patient angel waiting for a place  
In the new Heavens,-- because nor sin nor woe,

Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,  
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,  
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,--  
Nothing repels thee,... Dearest, teach me so  
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

The title, **Because**, comes from the first word which is repeated twice in key positions within the poem and distills the thrust of the text.

Within the poem's rigorous Sonnet structure lies a wealth of dramatic and contrasting images and thumbnail sketches evocative of deep feeling and long experience. Consequently, **Because** shifts moods rapidly along with changes in the text and imagines the emotional foundation for each declaration.

## About the Musical Materials

**Because** uses a pitch collection Vincent Persichetti called the "symmetrical scale" (e.g., C-D-Eb-F-F#-G#-A-B). This scale (also known as the octatonic scale) sounds a lot like the familiar minor scale – you can build it by taking the first four notes of the minor scale and then transposing them by a tritone.

In **Because** the symmetrical scale is used as a collection in much the same way the chromatic scale is the underlying collection in twelve-tone music. The melodic/harmonic material is derived from the first four notes of the piece, which appear in a variety of guises, including some gestures which are homonyms of tonal music.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Gregg Smith Singers, who first read **Because**, and to the *Goldene Keyt* Singers (Mary Ellen Callahan, Hsi-Ling Chang, Michael Steinberger, and Tom Meglioranza), who made a heartfelt recording.

To my wife Judith, the inspiration behind this and other pieces of my music, my undying love and gratitude.

## About Mark Zuckerman

Mark Zuckerman received a 2004 Artist Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. He holds a PhD in composition from Princeton University, and is a student of Milton Babbitt, David Epstein, J. K. Randall, and Elie Yarden. He has taught composition, tonal and atonal theory, orchestration, and computer music at Princeton and Columbia Universities, and published numerous scholarly articles and a book on listening to jazz, drawn from a popular jazz survey course he taught at Princeton and Columbia.

He founded *Di Goldene Keyt*, The Yiddish Chorale, and has written a bunch of choral music in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish, including some twenty arrangements for a cappella mixed chorus of Yiddish songs.

His choral music has been performed by such notable conductors as Gregg Smith, Judith Clurman, Zalmen Mlotek, Elayne Robinson Grossman, and Ben Schaechter ; and is published by Carl Fischer, ECS Publishing, and Transcontinental Music. His choral music has been featured and recorded by such groups as The Gregg Smith Singers, The Rottenberg Chorale; The New Yiddish Chorale; The Workmen's Circle Chorus; *Di Goldene Keyt*, The Yiddish Chorale; and the *Goldene Keyt* Singers.

# Because

for unaccompanied SATB

Text: Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Sonnet XXXIX From The Portuguese)

Music: Mark Zuckerman

With Ardor and Humility (♩ = 48) *mp* *cresc.*

S *mf* thou hast the pow - - - - er and own'st the  
*mf* *mp* *cresc.* *f* *p*  
A Be - cause thou hast the pow - - - - er and own'st the  
*mf* *mp* *cresc.* *f* *p*  
T thou hast the pow - - - - er and own'st the  
*mf* *mp* *cresc.* *f* *p*  
B Be - cause thou hast the pow - - - - er and own'st the

④  
S grace To look and be - hind this mask of me  
*mf* *p*  
A grace To look through be - hind this mask of me  
*mf* *p*  
T grace To look through be - hind this mask of me  
*mf* *p*  
B grace To look and be - hind this mask of me

⑦  
S (A - gainst which years A - gainst which years have beat thus  
*p* *sub mf* *cresc.*  
A (A - gainst which years A - gainst which years have beat thus  
*p* *sub mf* *cresc.*  
T (A - gainst which years A - gainst which years have beat thus  
*pp* *sub mf* *cresc.*  
B (A - gainst which years A - gainst which years have beat thus  
*pp* *sub mf* *cresc.*

10 *f* *mf* *dim.* *mp*

S blanch - ing - ly With their rains), With their rains), and be -

A *f* *mf* *dim.* *mp*

A blanch - ing - ly With their rains), and be -

T *f* *mf* *dim.* *mp*

T blanch - ing - ly With their rains), and be -

B *f* *mf* *dim.* *mp*

B blanch - ing - ly With their rains), and be -

13 *p* *mp* *mf*

S hold my soul's true face, The dim and wea - ry wit - ness

A *p* *p*

A hold my soul's true face, Oo

T *p* *p*

T hold my soul's true face, Oo

B *p* *p*

B hold my soul's true face, Oo

17 *dim.* *poco rit.* *a tempo* *mp* *cresc.*

S of life's race,— the faith

A *pp* *mp* *cresc.*

A Oo Oo Be - cause thou hast the faith

T *pp*

T Oo Oo Oo

B *pp* *mp* *cresc.*

B Oo Oo Be - cause thou hast the faith

20

Musical score for measures 20-23, featuring four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "and love the faith and love the faith and love the faith and love". Dynamics include *mf*, *cresc.*, and *f*.

S and A: and love  
T: the faith and love  
B: the faith and love

23

Musical score for measures 23-26, featuring four vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy, to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy, The to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy, to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy,". Dynamics include *sub mf*, *p*, and *mf*.

S: to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy,  
A: to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy,  
T: to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy, The  
B: to see, Through that same soul's dis-tract-ing le-thar-gy,

26

Musical score for measures 26-29, featuring four vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Ah Ah Ah pa-tient an-gel wait-ing for a place In the new". Dynamics include *pp* and *p*. The Tenor part includes the instruction *espr.*

S: Ah Ah Ah  
A: Ah Ah Ah  
T: pa-tient an-gel wait-ing for a place In the new  
B: (no lyrics)

29 *mf* *mp cresc.* *f* *ff*

S *mf* *mp cresc.* *f* *ff*  
Ah Ah

A *mf* *mp cresc.* *f* *ff*  
Ah Ah

T *f* *mp cresc.* *f* *ff*  
Hea - vens, Ah Ah

B *mp cresc.* *f* *ff*  
Ah Ah

33 *p* *mf* *p*

S *p*  
be - cause

A *p* *mf*  
be - cause nor woe, Nor

T *p*  
be - cause

B *mf*  
be - cause nor sin nor woe, Nor

35 *poco stringendo* *sub p* *mf* *p cresc.* *f*

S *sub p* *mf* *p cresc.* *f*  
God's in - flic - tion, nor death's neigh - - - bour-hood, Nor all

A *sub p* *mf* *p cresc.* *f*  
God's in - flic - tion, death's neigh - - - bour-hood, Nor all

T *sub p* *mf* *p cresc.* *f*  
God's in - flic - tion, nor death's neigh - - - bour-hood, Nor all

B *sub p* *mf* *p cresc.* *f*  
God's in - flic - tion, death's neigh - - - bour-hood, Nor all

*a tempo*

37

S which o - thers view - ing, turn to go, Nor all

A which o - thers view - ing, turn to go, Nor all

T Oo turn to go, be - cause Nor all

B Oo turn to go, be - cause Nor all

*p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *pp* *p* *pp* *pp*

40

S which makes me tired of all,

A which makes me tired of all,

T which makes me tired of all,

B me tired of all,

*mp cresc.* *f cresc.* *ff* *mp cresc.* *f cresc.* *ff* *mf cresc.* *ff* *mf cresc.* *ff*

43

S self - viewed, — No - thing re - pels

A self - viewed, — No - thing

T self - viewed, — No - thing

B self - viewed, — No - thing

*dim.* *f* *sub mf* *dim.* *p* *dim.* *f* *sub mf* *dim.* *pp* *dim.* *f* *sub mf* *dim.* *pp* *dim.* *f* *sub mf* *dim.* *pp*

46 *poco rit.* *a tempo mp*

S thee,... No-thing re - pels thee,... Dear - est, teach me so

A No - thing No - thing No - thing Dear - est,

T No - thing No - thing Dear - est, teach me so

B *p* No - thing re - pels thee,... *pp* No - thing *p* Dear - est,

50 *poco stringendo mf* *a tempo mf* *poco rit. dim.*

S Dear-est, teach me so Dear - est, Dear - est, teach me so

A Dear - est, Dear - est, Dear - est, teach me so

T Dear-est, teach me so Dear - est, Dear - est, teach me so

B Dear - est, Dearest, Dear - est, teach me so

53 *poco meno mosso mp* *f* *sub p*

S To pour out grat - i - tude, as thou dost, good!

A To pour out grat - i - tude, as thou dost, good!

T To pour out grat - i - tude, as thou dost, good!

B To pour out grat - i - tude, as thou dost, good!