

music by shawn e okpebholo
text by marcus amaker

unknown

song cycle for mezzo-soprano,
two baritones, and chamber ensemble

commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of
the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery

Commissioned by **UrbanArias** with
the **Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts**,
Opera Colorado, **Minnesota Opera**,
Opera Birmingham, and
Stephen E. and Dorothy P. Bird

note from the composer

unknown is a five-movement song cycle for mezzo-soprano, two baritones, and chamber ensemble commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a memorial at Arlington Cemetery for unidentified soldiers who have succumbed to war. Poet Marcus Amaker penned the evocative text.

The first movement begins with an extended and solemn introduction. From the perspective of a soldier, it is an anthem expressing the realities of war, but also the pride for her country and the service and sacrifice she's willing to give for the place she calls home.

The second movement is a melancholic waltz from the perspective of the loved one of a soldier off to war. With only letters and anxiety, there is still space for hope that his beloved will return home.

The third movement—ever so soulful, requiring the baritone voice to engage his falsetto—is an introspective lament from the viewpoint of an injured soldier who is mindful that he is about to die and transition to his eternal home.

From the perspectives of the guards who protect the tomb 24 hours a day, the fourth movement is a dignified march, sustained by an irregular-metered drum cadence: 21/8. The number 21 is significant because a soldier who guards the tomb marches 21 steps, rests for 21 seconds, and repeats this routine in all directions until the soldier's shift is over. I subtly quote *Taps*, the bugle call that happens during military funerals at, coincidentally, 21:00 hours. And, I also briefly quote *America the Beautiful* as an homage to the third verse, which says,

*Oh beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife
Who more than self, their country loved
And mercy more than life.*

The final movement is a poetic *In Memoriam* for the unknowns, and in a way, serves as a reprise for the cycle. This contemplative setting brings back motives, harmonies, themes, and texts from the previous four movements, musically embodying the various aspects of what it means to go off to war.

poems

1.

As the morning rises
with the clean air of summer,
my mind is clouded
in smoke.

Anxiety is ammunition
for a duty
that haunts
my dreams:

A war that will
take me away from home,
a departure
that digs deep
within the battlefields
of my soul.

I am one
of many warriors
willing to
fight for a country
that promises freedom,

a country
that I am proud
to call

2.

Home is a hollow space
when world-wide hostility
takes ahold of its habitat.

Beneath this roof
are memories
of life without combat,
a breath before bloodshed,
a love untouched by fear.

I am haunted
more than I am happy.

Reading letters
loaded with the tragedies
of war,
stories about future legends,
soon-to-be ghosts
who fought with honor,
and lost their lives
without losing their faith.

home.

3.
If death has a sound,
then I am now its echo.

Silence will soon
pass through me

and I will remember
that I was made
to have an ending.

And war,
with its infinite reverence,
also has boundary.

I am far
from my family,
but I will soon
be home.

4.
With honor,
I march.

21 steps
in time
for the timeless spirits
of soldiers.

With service,
I march.

21 seconds
in rhythm
for the breathless voices
of the decorated
and departed.

With commitment,
I march.

24 hours
in tempo
to guard the ghosts
who gave their lives
for our country

so that we
can safely call
this land
our home.

5.
Layers of remembrance
hover over us like clouds.

When it rains,
we are wrapped
in sorrow
because we can't escape
the memory of
fallen heroes.

How many storms
have gone unnoticed?

How many more
downpours deserve
our attention?

Our homes
and hearts
are enlivened
by the recognition
of generations
who are gone,
but never forgotten.

piano/vocal score

Duration: 18 minutes

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I.

Music by Shawn E. Okpebholo
Text by Marcus Amaker

Reflective, patient, warm ♩ = 64

Mezzo-Soprano

Piano

p quasi free

A

Musical score for section A, measures 5-9. The Mezzo-Soprano part has whole rests. The Piano part features complex chords and arpeggios in the right hand, and a triplet in the left hand at measure 7.

B

Musical score for section B, measures 10-14. The Mezzo-Soprano part has whole rests. The Piano part features complex chords and arpeggios in the right hand, and a triplet in the left hand at measure 11. A 'steady groove' section begins at measure 13.

14

14

18

18

C

mp sweetly

As — the morn-ing ri - ses

21

mp

24

mf slightly anxious

— with the clean air of sum-mer, my mind is cloud-ed in smoke. — An - xi - e -

24

mf

27

ty is am-mu-ni-tion for du-ty that haunts my dreams:

27

D

f

3

3

A war that will take me a - way, a - way from home,

30

f

32

3

A de-part-ure that digs deep with - in the

32

34

3

bat - tle fields of my soul.

34

36

36

dim. poco a poco

39

E *p* delicate and proud

3

I am one — of man - y war - ri'ors

39

p

42

3

will - ing to fight for a coun - try that prom - i - ses free - dom.

42

3

45

pp

A

45

48 *poco rall.* $\text{♩} = 64$

coun - try that I'm proud to call home.

pp *steady groove*

51

54

2.

Melancholic, nostalgic, satisfying groove ♩ = 92

Baritone A

Piano

p expressive and free

6

11

A

pp

mp

Home is a

16

hol - low space when world - wide hos - stil - i - ty takes

20

light - a - hold... takes a - hold of its ha -

23

- bi - tat. Home is a hol -

26

low space... *p* float... B

29

C

mf slightly animated

Be - neath this roof _____ are me - mo - ries of _____

mf

This block contains measures 29 through 32. The vocal line (bass clef) begins at measure 29 with a half rest, followed by a quarter note G2, a half note F2, and a quarter note E2. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) starts with a half rest in measure 29, then a half note G2 in measure 30, and a half note F2 in measure 31. The piano part features a *mf* dynamic marking and a crescendo hairpin across measures 30 and 31. The lyrics are: "Be - neath this roof _____ are me - mo - ries of _____".

33

_____ life _____ with - out com - bat, a breath _____ be - fore blood - shed,

This block contains measures 33 through 35. The vocal line (bass clef) has a half rest in measure 33, followed by a quarter note G2, a half note F2, and a quarter note E2. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) has a half rest in measure 33, followed by a half note G2 in measure 34, and a half note F2 in measure 35. The lyrics are: "_____ life _____ with - out com - bat, a breath _____ be - fore blood - shed,".

36

of love _____ un - touched by fear. Be - neath this roof _____

f full

f

This block contains measures 36 through 39. The vocal line (bass clef) has a half rest in measure 36, followed by a quarter note G2, a half note F2, and a quarter note E2. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) has a half rest in measure 36, followed by a half note G2 in measure 37, and a half note F2 in measure 38. The piano part features a *f* dynamic marking and a crescendo hairpin across measures 37 and 38. The lyrics are: "of love _____ un - touched by fear. Be - neath this roof _____".

40

_____ are _____ mem - or - ries. _____

dim.

This block contains measures 40 through 43. The vocal line (bass clef) has a half rest in measure 40, followed by a quarter note G2, a half note F2, and a quarter note E2. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) has a half rest in measure 40, followed by a half note G2 in measure 41, and a half note F2 in measure 42. The piano part features a *dim.* dynamic marking and a decrescendo hairpin across measures 42 and 43. The lyrics are: "_____ are _____ mem - or - ries. _____".

43

D

mp sorrowing

portamento

I am haunt - ed more

47

than I am hap - py.

52

p

I am haunt - ed more than I am hap - py.

p still delicate

57

molto rall.

Introspectively ♩ = 68

E

mp expressive and free

Read - ing let - ters load - ed with the

61

tra - ge - dies of war, stor - ies a - bout fu - ture le - gends.

65

soon - to - be ghosts who faught with hon - or and lost thier

69

lives with - out los - ing thier faith.

73

Home is a hol - low space...

sadly

attaca

3.

With depth, soulful ♩ = 60

Baritone B

Piano

Musical score for Baritone B and Piano, measures 1-5. The Baritone B part is in the bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of three flats. It begins with a whole note G2, followed by rests. The Piano part is in the grand staff, 4/4 time, with a key signature of three flats. It begins with a piano (p) dynamic, followed by a series of chords and melodic lines in both staves, including a prominent eighth-note melody in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand.

6

Musical score for Baritone B and Piano, measures 6-10. The Baritone B part continues with rests. The Piano part continues with complex harmonic textures, featuring sustained chords and moving lines in both staves, maintaining the same key signature and time signature.

A

11

p

neo soul[ful] throughout (elegant, deeply personal, delayed backbeat at times, a touch of ad lib), with classical bent

Musical score for Baritone B and Piano, measures 11-14. The Baritone B part begins with the lyrics "If death has a sound then I am not its ec - ho,". The Piano part continues with complex harmonic textures, featuring sustained chords and moving lines in both staves, maintaining the same key signature and time signature.

delicate falsetto, when needed,
never full voice in higher range

15

Si - lence will soon pass through me and I will re - mem -

19

- - ber _____ that I _____ was made to have an end - ing... _____

B

feel free to ad lib
itches and vowels.
subtle cry, light to no vibrato

mmm _____ ooo _____ ah _____

25

I _____ was made to _____ have _____ an _____ end - ing... _____

C

28

D

mp forbearing, affecting

33

And war, with it's in - fi -

mp

36

36

- nite reve - rence, al - so had bound -

40

40

- a - ry. I am far from my fam-i - ly I -

43

am far from my fam-i-ly

46

E

I will soon be home...

49

I will soon be home... home...

53

F

p

I will soon be home...

G

I will soon be

home...

ooo

pp

ooo

I will soon be home...

4.

Stately, sacred, steady march-like cadence ♩ = 87; ♩. = 58
(21/8 feel - [2+2+3 | 2+3+2 | 3 + 2 + 2])

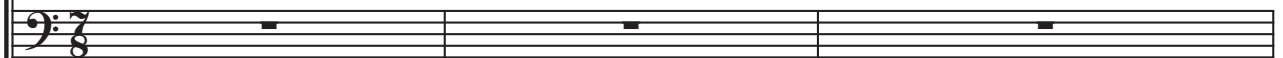
Mezzo-Soprano



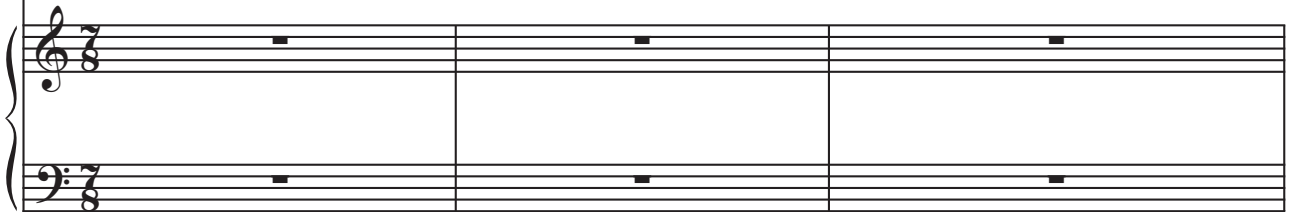
Baritone A



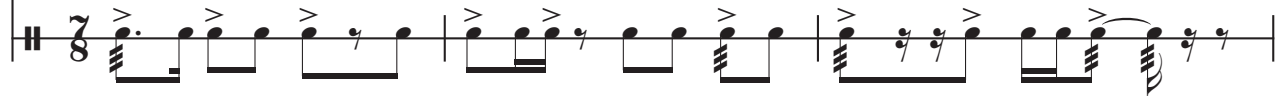
Baritone B



Piano



Snare Drum



pp metronomic

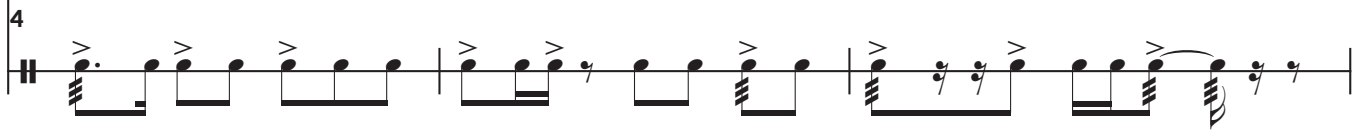
Mezzo



Bar. A



Bar. B



A

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

Mezzo: Treble clef, three measures of whole rests.

Bar. A: Bass clef, three measures of whole rests.

Bar. B: Bass clef, three measures of whole rests.

Piano: Treble and Bass clefs. Treble clef has three measures of whole rests. Bass clef has a melodic line starting on G2, moving stepwise up to D3 in the third measure. Dynamics: *p* in the first measure.

Drum: Single line with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Measures 7-9 contain a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with accents (>). Dynamics: *p* in the first measure.

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

Mezzo: Treble clef, three measures of whole rests.

Bar. A: Bass clef, three measures of whole rests.

Bar. B: Bass clef, three measures of whole rests.

Piano: Treble and Bass clefs. Treble clef has whole rests in measures 10 and 11, and a chord in measure 12. Bass clef has a melodic line starting on G2, moving stepwise up to D3 in the third measure. Dynamics: *delicate attack* written below the first measure.

Drum: Single line with a key signature of one sharp (F#). Measures 10-12 contain a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with accents (>).

B

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

13

13

mp

13

mp

This system contains measures 13, 14, and 15. The vocal parts (Mezzo, Bar. A, Bar. B) have whole rests. The piano part features a series of chords in the right hand and a moving bass line in the left hand. The percussion part plays a consistent eighth-note pattern with accents.

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

16

16

16

16

This system contains measures 16, 17, and 18. The vocal parts (Mezzo, Bar. A, Bar. B) have whole rests. The piano part continues with chords and a moving bass line. The percussion part maintains the eighth-note pattern with accents.

C

Mezzo *mf* proudly
With hon - or, I march. _____ twen - ty - one steps in time _____

Bar. A *mf* proudly
With hon - or, I march. _____ twen - ty - one steps in time _____

Bar. B *mf* proudly
With hon - or, I march. _____ twen - ty - one steps in time _____

19 *mf*

Mezzo
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.

Bar. A
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.

Bar. B
for the time - less spir - its of sol - diers.

22

D

Mezzo



Bar. A



Bar. B



25

f

25

f

E

Mezzo

f

With ser - vice, I march. _____ twen - ty - one sec -

Bar. A

28 *f*

With ser - vice, I march. _____ twen - ty - one sec -

Bar. B

28 *f*

With ser - vice, I march. _____ twen - ty - one sec -

28

28

f

Mezzo 30 *ff*
 onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less

Bar. A 30 *ff*
 onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less

Bar. B 30 *ff*
 onds in rhy - thm for the breath - less

30 *ff*
 3 3

30 *ff*
 3 3

Mezzo 32
 voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed

Bar. A 32
 voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed

Bar. B 32
 voic - es of the dec - o - rat - ed

32
 3 3

32
 3 3

F

Mezzo

34 *fff*

and de - part - ed.

Bar. A

34 *fff*

and de - part - ed.

Bar. B

34 *fff*

and de - part - ed.

34

sub. p *cresc. poco a poco to f*

34

sub. p *cresc. poco a poco to f*

Mezzo

37

Bar. A

37

Bar. B

37

37

37

G

Mezzo

40

Bar. A

40

Bar. B

40

f

Mezzo

44

Bar. A

44

Bar. B

44

f

H

Mezzo *ff* proudly
With com - mit - ment I march. _____ twen - ty - four hours in tem - po to

Bar. A *ff* proudly
With com - mit - ment I march. _____ twen - ty - four hours in tem - po to

Bar. B *ff* proudly
With com - mit - ment I march. _____ twen - ty - four hours in tem - po to

47 *ff*

47 *ff*

47 *ff*

47 *ff*

Mezzo
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we

Bar. A
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we

Bar. B
guard the ghosts who gave their lives for our coun - try so that we

50

50

50

50

50

53 *fff*

Mezzo

can safe - ly call this land our home. _____

53 *fff*

Bar. A

can safe - ly call this land our home. _____

53 *fff*

Bar. B

can safe - ly call this land our home. _____

53

fff

53 *fff*

I

Mezzo

56

Bar. A

56

Bar. B

56

59

Mezzo

59

Bar. A

59

Bar. B

59

59

59

3 3 3 3

J

Mezzo

62

Bar. A

62

Bar. B

We

We

We

62

62

62

3 3 3 3

K

Mezzo



Bar. A

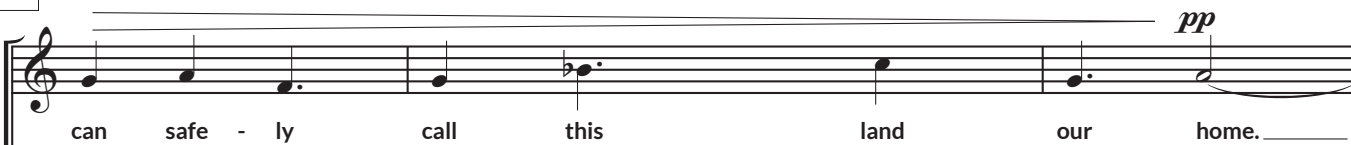


Bar. B



L

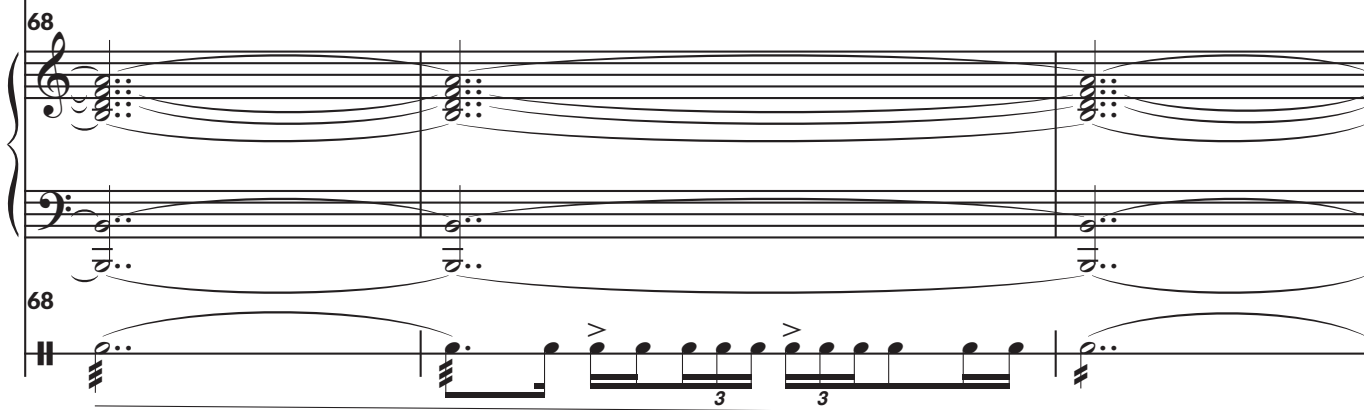
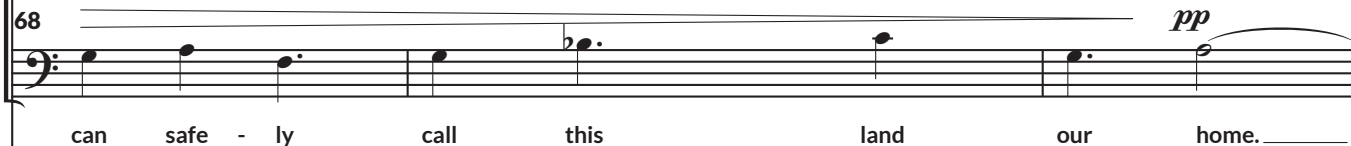
Mezzo



Bar. A



Bar. B



M

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

71

71

71

71

ppp

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

74

74

74

74

74

5.

Somber and warm ♩ = 60

Mezzo-Soprano

Baritone A

Baritone B

Piano

p honest
3

Lay - ers of ____ re - mem - ber - ance ho - ver o - ver us ____ like clouds. ____

A

Mezzo

Bar. A

Bar. B

p mournful, free, expressive
3

B

Mezzo

6

Bar. A

6

Bar. B

C

Mezzo

10

Bar. A

10

Bar. B

mp expressive, elegant

When it rains, we are wrapped in sor - row be-cause

mp not detached, smooth

13

Mezzo

13

Bar. A

13

Bar. B

We can't es - cape the mem - o - y of

17

Mezzo

D

17

Bar. A

17

Bar. B

fal - len he - roes.

p

Mezzo 22 E *mp* sweetly, soulful, patient

Bar. A 22

Bar. B 22

How man - y storms _____

Mezzo 26

Bar. A 26

Bar. B 26

_____ have _____ gone un - no - ticed? _____ How man - y _____

F

Mezzo

29

Bar. A

Bar. B

29

more down - pours de - serve

mp sorrowful, warm

I was

Mezzo

32

Bar. A

Bar. B

32

our at - ten - tion. Our homes and hearts

made to have an end - ing...

34 G

Mezzo
 _____ are en-liv - ened by _____ the re - cog - ni - tion _____ of _____ gen - e - ra -

34 *mp* proud, warm

Bar. A
 I am one _____ on man - y war - ri'ors will - ing to

34

Bar. B
 I _____ was made to have an end - ing... _____

34

37

Mezzo
 tions. who _____ are _____ gone _____ but,

37

Bar. A
 fight for a coun - try that prom - i - ses free - dom.

37

Bar. B
 I will soon be home. ...but,

37

39

Mezzo

ne - ver for - got ten. _____ I will soon

39

Bar. A

I am one _____ of man - y war - ri'ors will - ing to

39

Bar. B

ne - ver for - got ten. _____ I will re -

39

H

Mezzo

_____ be home ...prom³-i - ses free - dom...

42

Bar. A

fight for a coun - try that prom³-i - ses free - dom. _____

42

Bar. B

mem - ber _____ that I _____ was made to have an

42

45 *p* I *pp*

Mezzo
ne-ver for-got ten._____ ne-ver for-got

45 *p* *pp*

Bar. A
ne-ver for-got ten._____ ne-ver for-got

45

Bar. B
____ end - ing... ____

45 *pp*

49

Mezzo
ten.

49

Bar. A
ten.

49 *pp*

Bar. B
I will soon be home..._____

49