

HYMN TUNE INTERPRETATION

SALLY ANN MORRIS

Be Thou My Vision

Text: "Be Thou My Vision".
Tune name: YADKINVILLE
10.10.9.10.

1. Be thou my vi - sion O Lord of my heart;
2. Be thou my wis - dom, and thou my true word;
3. Great God of heav - en, my vic - to - ry won,

Naught be all else to me save that thou art.
I ev - er with thee and thou with me, Lord;
May I reach heav - en's joys O bright heaven's Sun!

Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Thou and thou on - ly first in my heart,
Heart of my own heart, what - ev - er be - fall;

Wak - ing or sleep - ing, thy pres - ence my light.
Great God of heav - en my treas - ure thou art.
Still be my vi - sion, O Ru - ler of all.

Posted on the wall beside my piano is a cartoon. A wizened old man sits at a desk and chuckles diabolically at the page he is creating. The caption reads: "In the gloom of his castle tower, the evil Dr. Mordrek composes new, unsingable tunes for cherished old hymns."

A friendly wag commented on the correspondence of the first three letters of the evil doctor's and my own last name. Although I am certain the cartoonist does not know me, I nevertheless identify strongly with the sentiment implied. How could I dare to put a new tune to a revered text such as "Be Thou My Vision"? How *do* composers dare to put new tunes to revered old texts?

Tune Copyright © 1998 GIA Publications, Inc., Chicago, IL. All Rights Reserved.

The title of this column is "Hymn Tune Interpretation." The pattern has been established that a composer offers to music directors and accompanists some performance suggestions. In a slight departure from that pattern, I am choosing to address the subject from the "front end" of the process.

I have heard many of my fellow composers share interesting and moving stories of their tune writing experiences. Most of us have had the privilege to work directly with gifted text writers, sometimes creating hymns and tunes together. There are other times, though, when we are faced with unusual circumstances. My answer to the above question is "Because I couldn't wiggle out of it" (or "because we couldn't wiggle out of it").

On the day before Easter three years ago when I worked as a sales associate for a piano dealership, my company delivered a lovely grand piano to a waiting congregation. The piano was a family's memorial gift. The unthinkable happened. Our delivery crew damaged the walnut cabinet which matched the pews so perfectly. Justifiably upset, the family demanded that we "make it right." Among the accepted terms of compensation was the promise of "a new hymn for the piano dedication service." I was only too glad to be able to help salvage this delicate situation. I submitted many wonderful new texts for their consideration. Imagine my surprise when I was told that the only text to which the family could all agree was "Be Thou My Vision," which, I assure you, had not been one of my suggestions.

I protested, pleaded, and tried to persuade them that a new tune was not needed for this text. It soon became apparent, however, that for the sake of peace and harmony I needed to "just do it."

With the specter of the lovely SLANE hanging over me, I avoided the temptation to cast this text again in a lilting $\frac{3}{4}$ ballad style. Yet I wanted the music to retain some sense of its ancient Gaelic origin. The $\frac{4}{4}$ casting creates opportunity for both important word emphases and also occasionally awkward syllables. Harmonically, the tune opens up and away from the key at the end of the second line, illustrating the text's transition to praise from prayer. The return to the original key at the start of the next stanza in a rather abrupt fashion accentuates this textual shift.

This tune should not be performed too slowly. A tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 112$ seems best, with a feel of two strong beats to the bar. Should anyone desire to use this setting for choir, I would think that with very few adjustments, the accompaniment could be sung chorally.

Although I truly regret the circumstances involving the piano, I am actually grateful to have spent time looking at an old text and seeing it through different eyes.

The name YADKINVILLE is in honor of the

town in the western Piedmont of North Carolina where the church in my story is located.

Sally Ann Morris is a hymn tune composer who lives and works in Lewisville, NC. Her tune collection, Giving Thanks in Song and Prayer, was published in 1998 by GIA Publications.

HYMN TUNE CONTEST CELEBRATING THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF CARSON-NEWMAN COLLEGE

The tune is to compliment the following hymn:

God of Beauty, Truth and Goodness
by W. L. Forbis

God of Beauty, Truth and Goodness,
Lord of Wisdom yet unknown
Grand us Strength to match the Vision
As we come before Your throne.

Chorus: Sing a joyful Alleluia,
Praising God in all you do,
And remember as you witness,
God is singing over you!

Stand for Truth and cry for Justice,
Share with those who don't belong,
And remember as you serve them,
Sing for those who have no song,

Chorus

Run with Faith and live with Honor,
Bearing witness to His call.
As disciples, build the future,
Until Christ is Lord of all.

Chorus

Make a joyful Celebration,
God in Christ has conquered death!
If you really are a witness,
Sing until you have no breath,

Chorus

Words © Carson-Newman College 1999

Deadline for submission: November 1, 2000

Prize: \$500.00

Questions and Submissions should be addressed to:

Dr. Clark Measels
Carson-Newman College
P O Box 72048
Jefferson City, TN 37760
865 / 471-3480
<measels@cncacc.cn.edu>