

# Sean O'Boyle

## "Conflict, Sadness, Victory & Resolution"

For Soprano & Chamber Orchestra

*Dedicated to my darling Suzanne Kompass*

Duration: 18:00

### **Commissioned by**

Concord Chamber Orchestra  
Maestro Jamin Hoffman  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

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Text

- #1 **Conflict** - "The Dead" by Rupert Brooke
- #2 **Sadness** - "Sonnet 30" by William Shakespeare
- #3 **Victory** - "Victory" by Rupert Brooke
- #4 **Resolution** - "Sunrise on the Coast" by AB "*Banjo*" Paterson

## **Composers Note: Conflict, Sadness, Victory & Resolution**

The opening line of the Rupert Brooke poem, *III The Dead*, “*Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!*”, embraces the romantic notion of war before the horrors of the great conflict of World War I were fully revealed. All over the world, young men scampered to join the “great adventure”. The opening is an awkward martial theme of consecutive minor chords, with bugles blowing their dissonant calls. This frenetic activity is short lived and we reflect the romantic view of war with the text at odds with the music bringing joy and hope. This too is short lived and the call of the bugles thunders back with furious agitation. The orchestra crescendos to fortissimo and is suddenly cut off leaving a low chord in the woodwinds. The muted timpani sounds mournful notes and a stately chorale builds from a single trumpet to complete majesty with the Soprano soaring over the orchestra, echoing the final words of the poem -

*“And Nobleness walks in our ways again; And we have come into our heritage.”*

The second movement is marked 'with quiet menace'. Melodies rise from the depths and the harmony takes unexpected twists. A desolate fragment is played on the bassoon and answered on oboe – a boy/man calling for his mother in his time of greatest need. The mood changes and the Soprano sings sweetly of remembrance with swirling chromatic harmony in attendance. The high woodwinds play a mocking parody of the opening of the first movement until the Soprano sings a soft, sighing melody. The strings play a faster paced section with motion created by simultaneous 3/4 and 6/8 patterns and the pitch gliding between the keys of Db & C. The flute chatter busily away. The Soprano sings of precious friends and “*death's dateless night*”. The winds come crashing in and remind us once again of the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement. A single horn note emerges from the action and once again the Soprano transports us to the world of chromatic harmony. She sings of being able to grieve, whilst low flutes and clarinets scurry restlessly under the surface. The menacing opening returns, with the Soprano giving a voice to the fragments. The orchestra dies away to silence.

Victory begins in an ominous tone. The consecutive minor chords rise and fall, the timpani plays in starts & fits, the violins attempt to penetrate the gloom with notes struck *col legno battuto*. (Italian for "hit with the wood") and the trumpets play single note bugle calls. The violins take on the challenge of the consecutive minor chords with a busy display of relentless activity. The instruments of the orchestra grudgingly join in to a rousing question. The violas and celli play a soft angular melody with swirling winds as accompaniment. The main theme of a jaunty, yet menacing, marching tune is sounded. The Soprano tells a strange tale of a journey to victory - “*Terror or triumph, were content to wait,*”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> movement is quoted, until the orchestra valiantly attempts to put victory on a more triumphant course. A calm interlude follows with the Soprano singing: “*Oh, perfect from the ultimate height of living,*” The orchestra will not be deterred and we are soon marching to our “supernal” destiny: “*Rank upon rank, unbridled, unforgiving, Thundered the black battalions of the Gods.*”

The resolution for dark times is the simple, yet glorious event that happens when the sun greets the coast each and every morning. The motion of the sea is ever present with the movement of the tides, wind and waves passed from instrument to instrument. The Soprano melody is set in a lower register and the ebb and flow of the music wishes to swamp her. At the place where the oceans encounter the lands, we marvel at the description -

*“And purple and scarlet and gold in its splendour - Behold, 'tis that marvel, the birth of a day!”*

**Sean O'Boyle**

12<sup>th</sup> August 2013

**The Dead** - by Rupert Brooke (3 August 1887 – 23 April 1915)

*Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!  
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,  
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.  
These laid the world away; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be  
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,  
That men call age; and those who would have been,  
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.*

*Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth  
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.  
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;  
And we have come into our heritage.*

**Sonnet 30** – William Shakespeare ( 26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616)

*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:  
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,  
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,  
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:  
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,  
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,  
Which I new pay as if not paid before.  
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.*

**Victory** - Rupert Brooke (3 August 1887 – 23 April 1915)

*All night the ways of Heaven were desolate,  
Long roads across a gleaming empty sky.  
Outcast and doomed and driven, you and I,  
Alone, serene beyond all love or hate,  
Terror or triumph, were content to wait,  
We, silent and all-knowing. Suddenly  
Swept through the heaven low-crouching from on high,  
One horseman, downward to the earth's low gate.*

*Oh, perfect from the ultimate height of living,  
Lightly we turned, through wet woods blossom-hung,  
Into the open. Down the supernal roads,  
With plumes a-tossing, purple flags far flung,  
Rank upon rank, unbridled, unforgiving,  
Thundered the black battalions of the Gods.*

**Sunrise on the Coast** - A.B. "Banjo" Paterson (17 February 1864 – 5 February 1941)

*Grey dawn on the sandhills – the night wind has drifted  
All night from the rollers a scent of the sea;  
With the dawn the grey fog his battalions has lifted,  
At the scent of the morning they scatter and flee.*

*Like mariners calling the roll of their number  
The sea fowl put out to the infinite deep.  
And far overhead – sinking softly to slumber –  
Worn out by their watching, the stars fall asleep.*

*To eastward where resteth the dome of the skies on  
The sea line stirs softly the curtain of night;  
And far from behind the enshrouded horizon  
Comes the voice of a God saying, "Let there be light."*

*An lo, there is light! Evanescent and tender,  
It glows ruby-red where 'twas now ashen grey;  
And purple and scarlet and gold in its splendour –  
Behold, 'tis that marvel, the birth of a day!*