Continental Divide

(an American cantata)

Peter Bird 2010

VOCAL PARTS with piano reduction of accompaniment



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Program Notes on Continental Divide

1. Timberline.....5

This first number is celebratory and could be subtitled, "Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country." But, rather than sonata form, it has a loose Mahlerian structure where one main melody is developed while 3 others vie for expression. A certain Romantic instability of key symbolizes enthusiasm that escapes Classical restraint. A final repetition of the initial section makes this structurally a da-capo aria for chorus.

The other 7 numbers of the cantata progress in historical order, from Pleistocene times before humans arrived, through the Arapaho era, the fur trade, pioneer days, arrival of the first tourists, the gold/silver rush, and the modern age of national parks and interstate highways. The central numbers (#3~6) have texts from oral tradition or contemporary accounts; the framing numbers at the start and end incorporate my own attempts at poetry.

The strong mantle plume that created Yellowstone has a few peers in the world: Iceland, Afar, and Hawaii. But here alone the volcanic plateau was built on the back of the older Rocky Mountain chain, producing lodgepole forests and parklands at 8,000' elevations and peaks that go much higher. This number depicts a summer dawn along one of the verdant high-altitude river valleys (*e.g.*, Lamar River, or Yellowstone River above the falls) where bison and elk are grazing, until interrupted by wolves. The text is a set of 6 haiku-like nature poems, with 5/7/5-syllable structure but no rhyme.

The adults of the village sing one of the traditional Arapaho Eagle Songs, with its proud refrain, "My father gave me the song of the eagle." (I did not alter this in any way, except to add some very light instrumental accompaniment.) A young man [or a group of young men; it may be performed either way] drifts off to follow the calls of a distant eagle. He is inspired to climb the mountain Neniisotoyou'u in search of other animal mentors. He is rebuffed by a bear, and then by a cougar, but high on the mountain shoulder he feels the presence and inspiration of Thunderbird. I based his (new) song on the text of a vision-quest song of Chief Yellow Calf: "[Thunder]bird walks about; the sky is turning yellow." (That is: Soon he will fly; prepare for thunder.) Performed in the Arapaho language. [Additional notes for performers are given on page 49.]

Osborne Russell (1814-1892) was a largely self-taught man from Maine who entered the trapper's life and the Rocky Mountain fur trade at the age of 20. (Later he was a miner, a farmer, a trader, and was elected judge and then triumvir in the provisional government of Oregon Territory.) He recorded his experiences in *Journal of a Trapper*... which was published posthumously. This solo aria takes its text from the book's valedictory poem, *The Hunter's Farewell*, which may be the only extant poem by anyone involved in this chapter of our history. His description of the impact of firearms on the flocks of the mountains and the herds of the plains is sensitive and moving.

5.	South	Pass5	;ç)
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The Sweetwater River route through South Pass is more lonely and barren than scenic, but topography dictated that here the California Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the Mormon Trail necessarily ran together for several days travel as they approached the Divide. I have merged 3 songs of the trail (each in its own meter and its own key) to represent the passage of these 3 distinct kinds of pioneers in the same year. *Ho! for California* represents the gold-miners; both text and tune are authentic, although reharmonized here. The Oregon-Trail text and tune are my own inventions. The text of the LDS hymn *Come, Come Ye Saints* was written by William Clayton (1814-1879) while traveling the trail in 1846; here, I have given it a new tune that better harmonizes with the others. Despite the cultural and musical contrasts, there is no actual dissonance; perhaps I may even suggest that a new kind of polymodal harmony emerges?

6. Isabella Bird71

Isabella Bird (1831-1904) was a very independent Englishwoman who toured the Sierra Nevada and the Colorado Rockies in 1873: arriving by train, renting a horse, and finding her own way through mountains and plains, come blizzard or sun. Her account, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, is well worth reading. This solo number uses a montage of her words to describe her ascent of Longs Peak (which was guided by the colorful and mysterious "Mountain Jim" Nugent). She may have been the first woman of European ancestry to make the ascent; it is certain that later she was the first woman inducted into the Royal Geographical Society, in London in 1892.

Saturday night in a mining town! This turbulent setting with its many conflicting personalities, subplots, and emotions is represented by the overlaying of up to 6 tunes at once. Traditional tunes *An Outlandish Knight* and *Shenandoah* represent the women's point of view, and some new tunes (in the "gaslight" style of the times) represent the men's. An opera-buffa version of the sextet from *Lucia* transported into *La fanciula del West*.

8. Logan Pass95

Approaching Glacier Park from the East, today's tourists can drive directly from the lonely and pristine rolling prairie of the Blackfeet lands to some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world. Chief Mountain, St. Mary Lake, Logan Pass, and the Garden Wall will not be forgotten by anyone who has made this trip, and of course the automobile makes it possible for most. But, travel by car is much too fast for the spirit.

Performance Notes

Continental Divide is scored for 9 instruments: flute, oboe, horn in F, pedal timpani (II, III, IV), violin I, violin II, cello, double-bass, and piano. (Piano parts occur only in numbers 6 & 7.) If the chorus is large, it may be best to amplify the instruments. I would not want to double them, as this would destroy the "rugged individualism" and lonesome timbre of solo performances. The total duration of this cantata is about 51 minutes.

Peter Bird, Los Angeles, 2010

Continental Divide: 1. Timberline



PETER BIRD



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Continental Divide: 1. Timberline Chorus & rehearsal piano



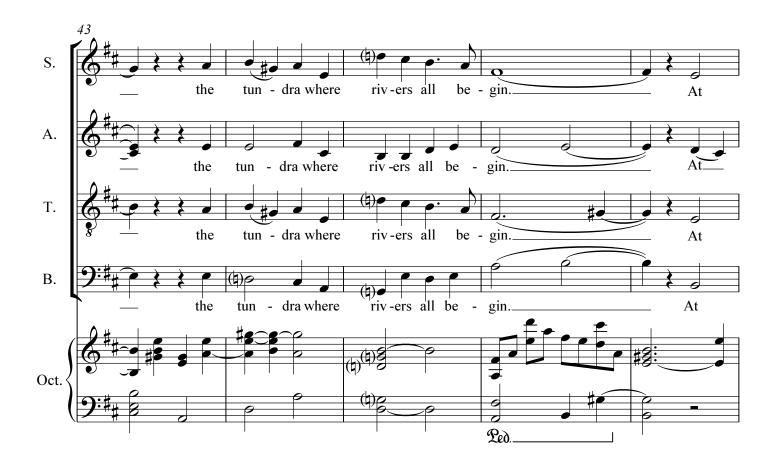
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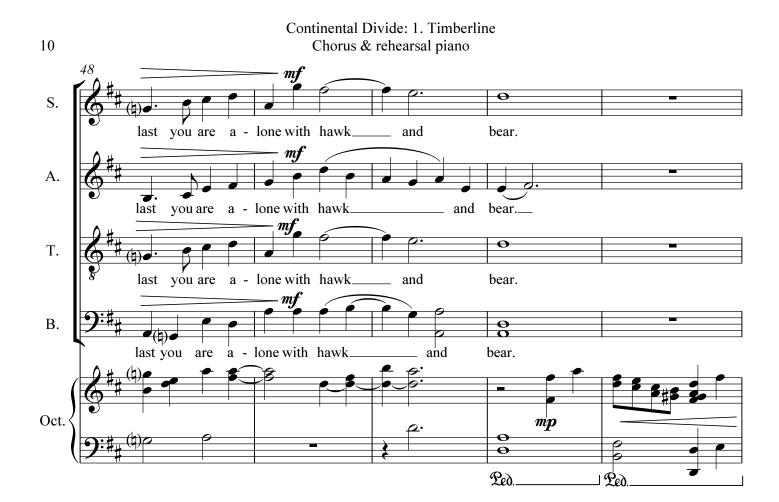


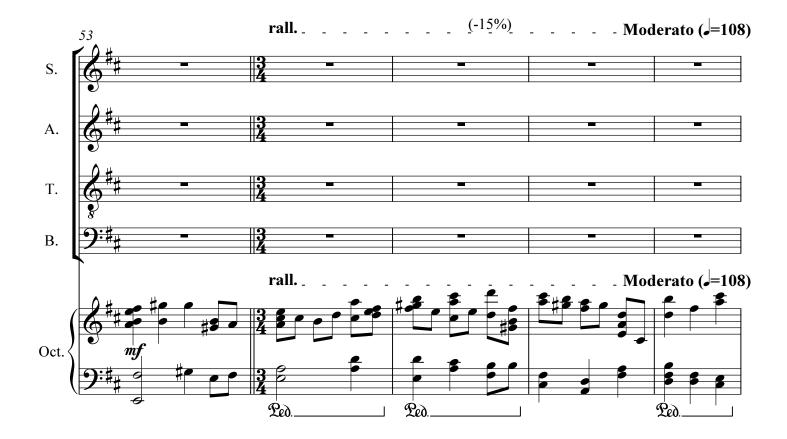


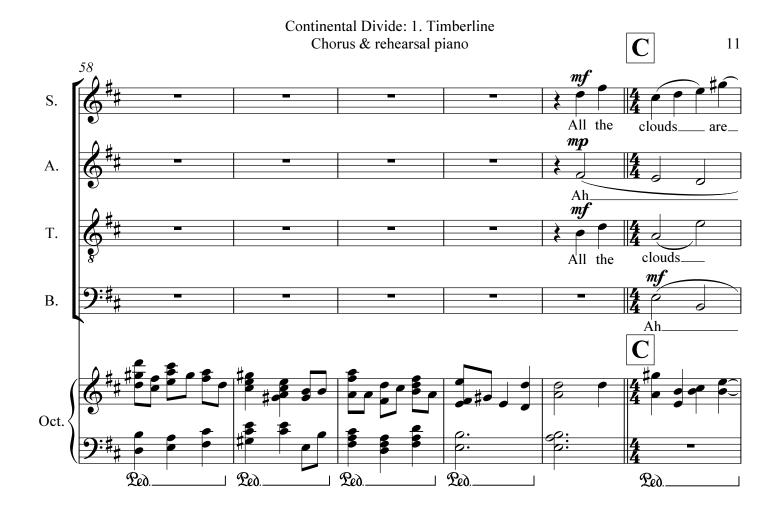
Continental Divide: 1. Timberline Chorus & rehearsal piano

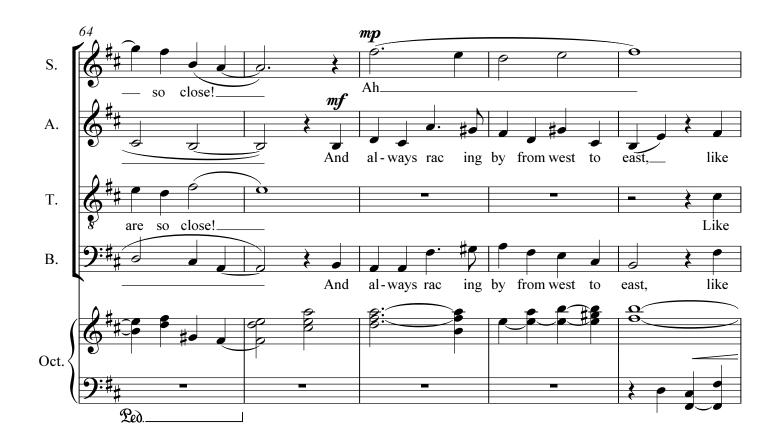












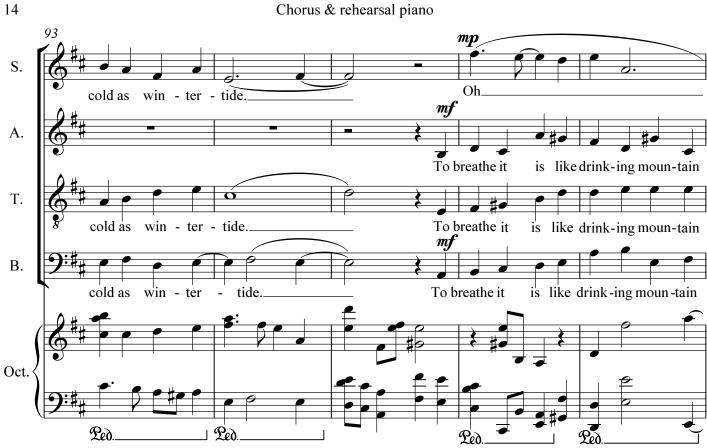
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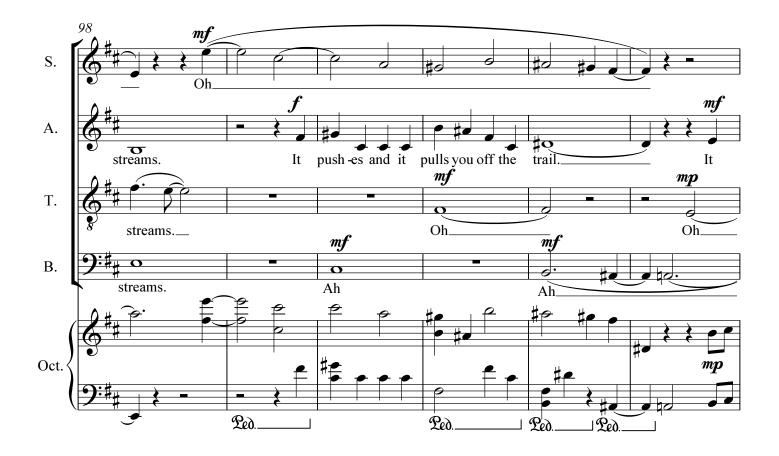






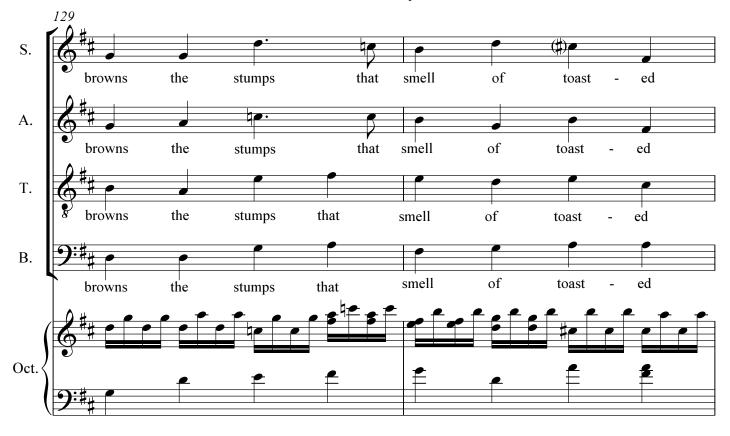
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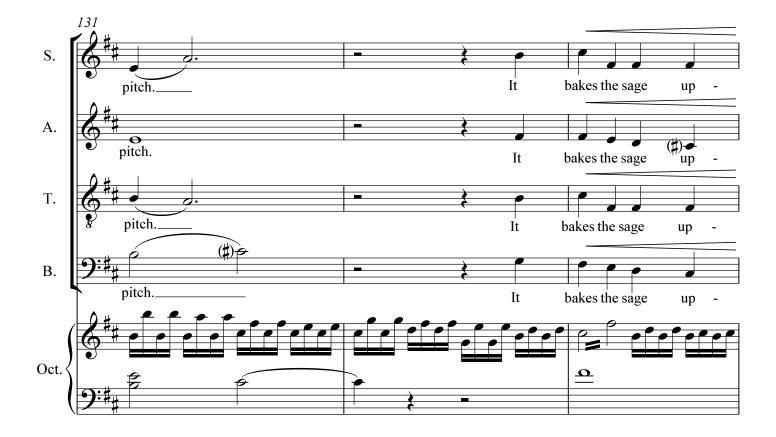






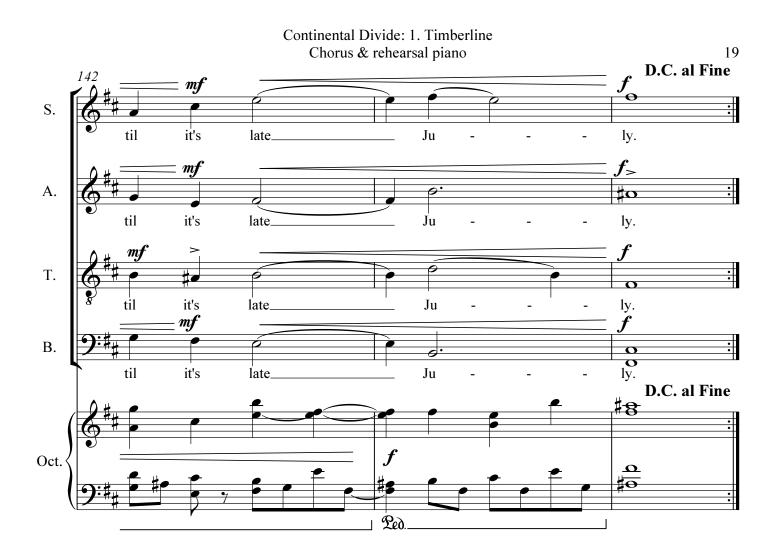






Continental Divide: 1. Timberline Chorus & rehearsal piano



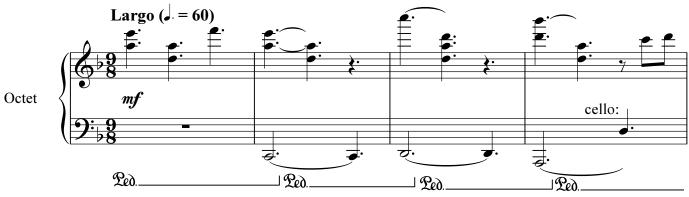


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Peter Bird





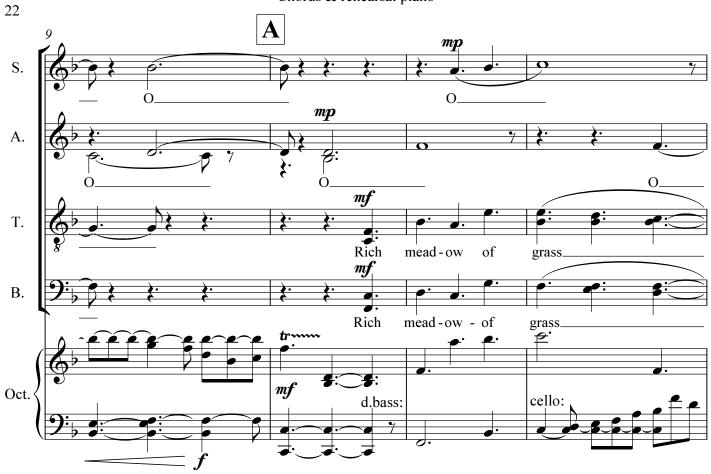


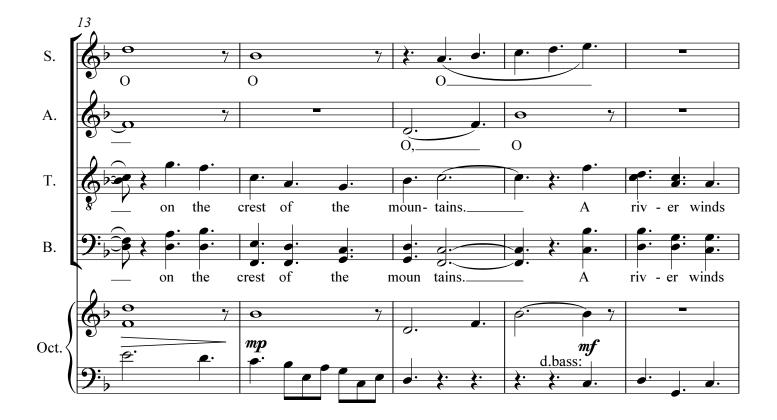


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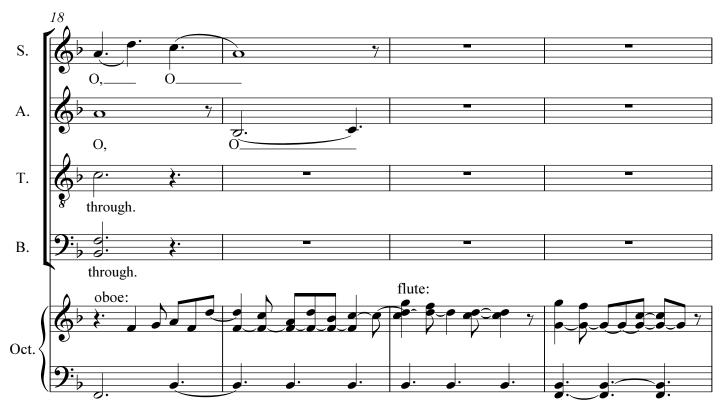
Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone

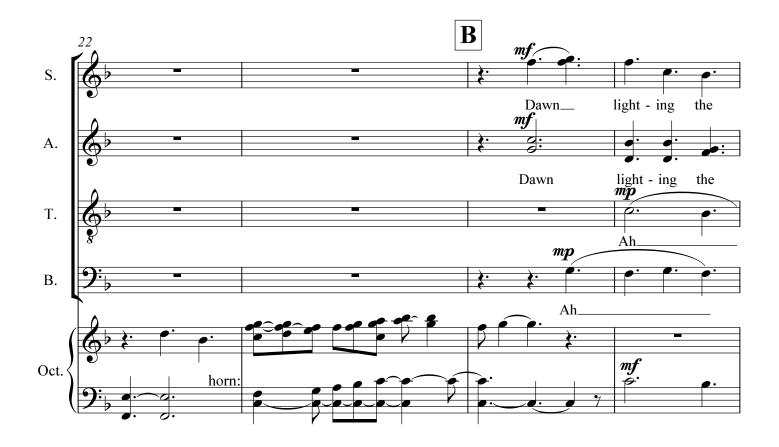
Chorus & rehearsal piano





Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano





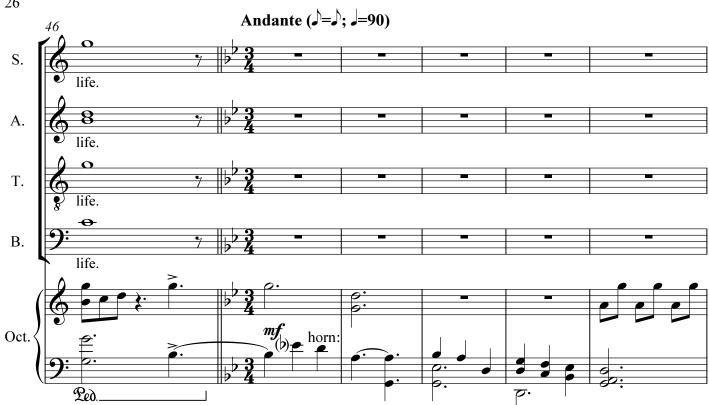
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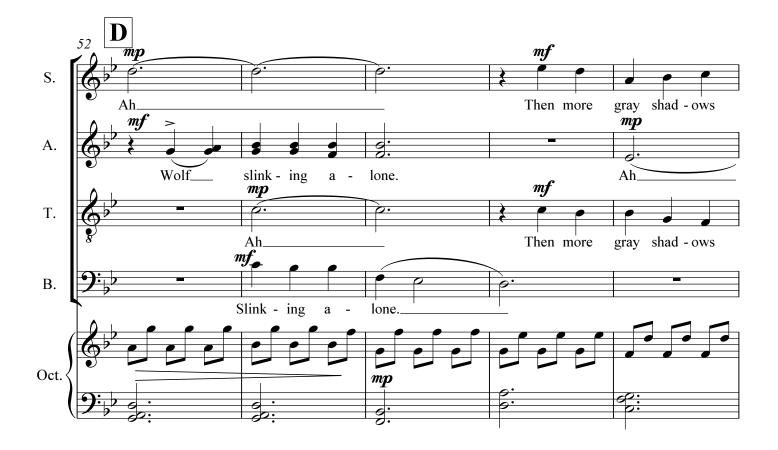






Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano





Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano

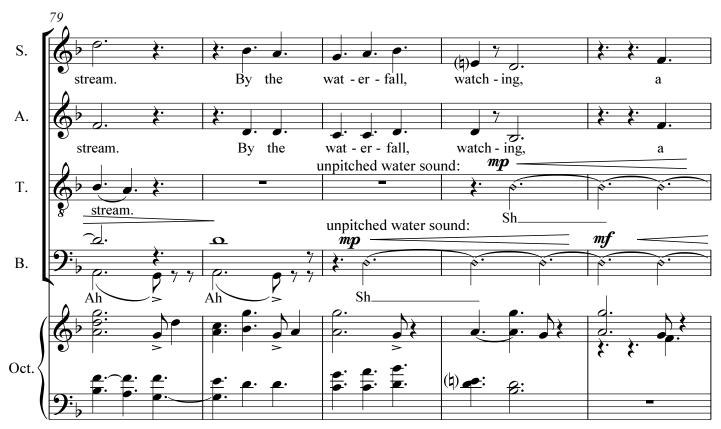


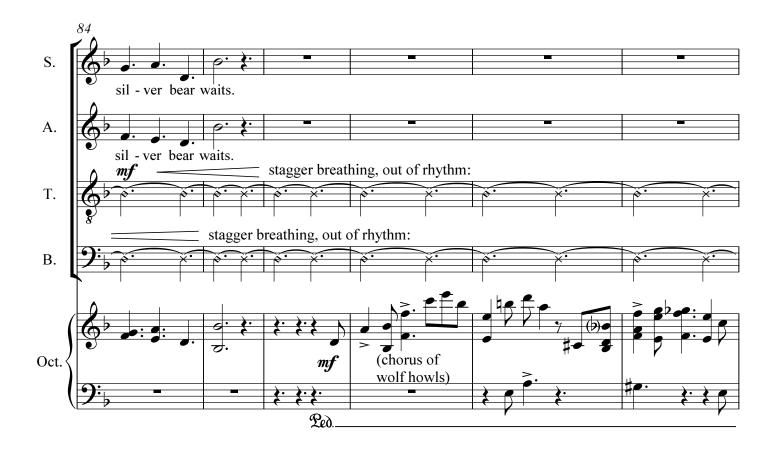


Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano

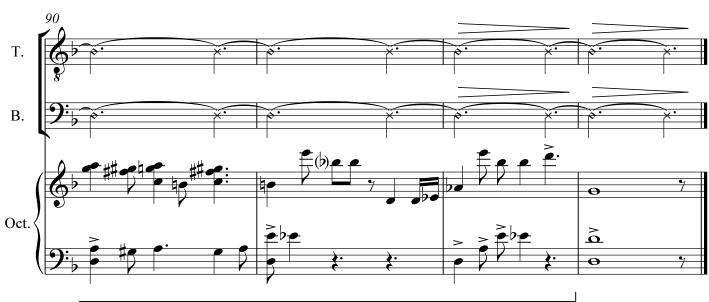


Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano





Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone Chorus & rehearsal piano



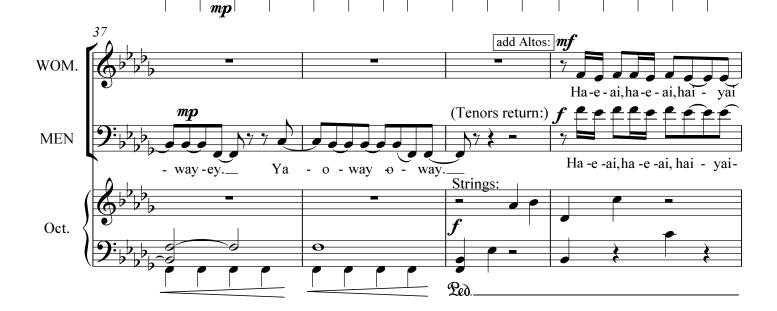


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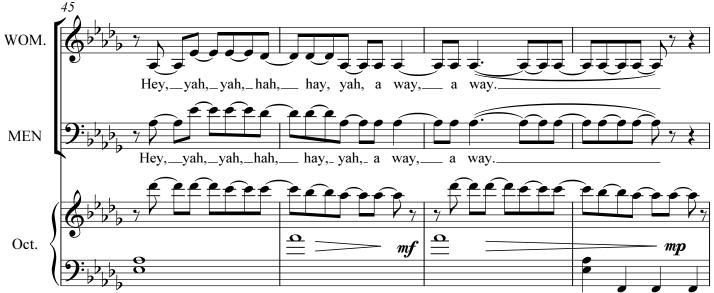
Continental Divide: 3. Vision Quest Chorus & rehearsal piano





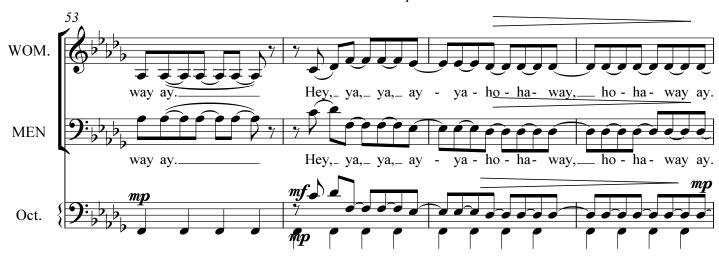


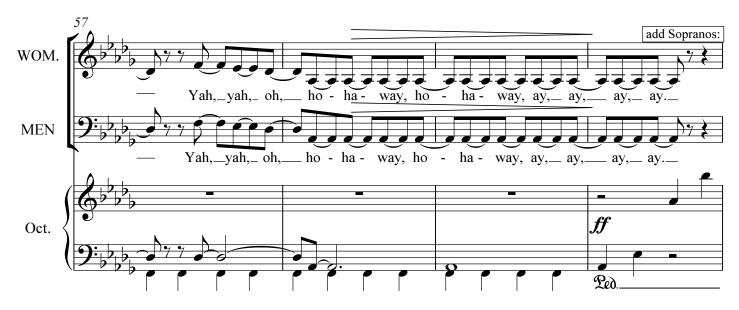






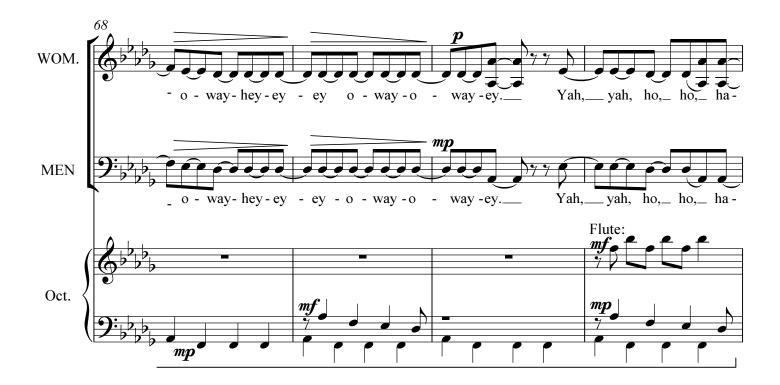
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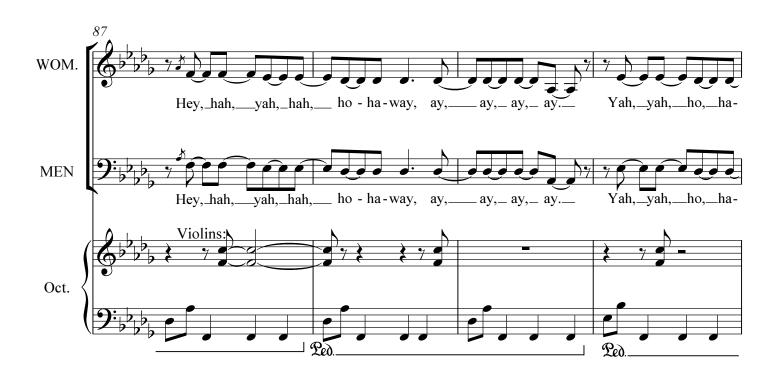




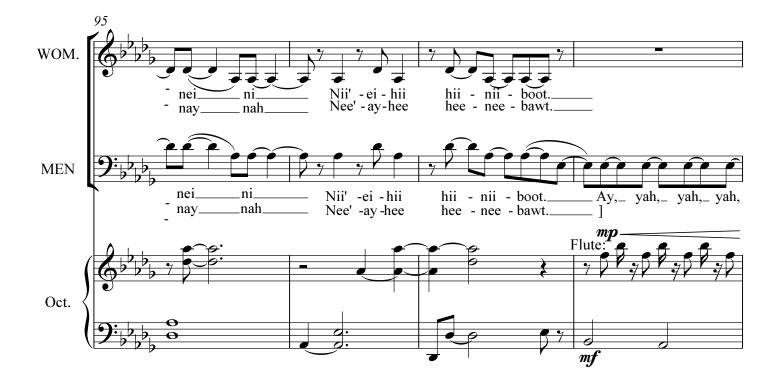












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Continental Divide: 3. Vision Quest Chorus & rehearsal piano





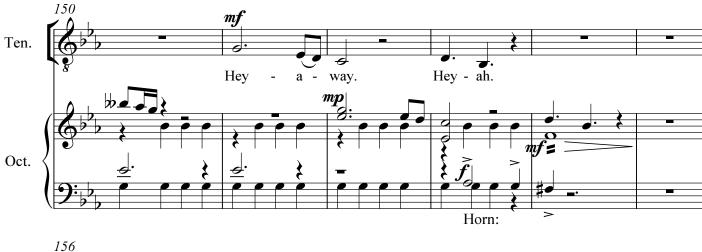
Continental Divide: 3. Vision Quest Chorus & rehearsal piano



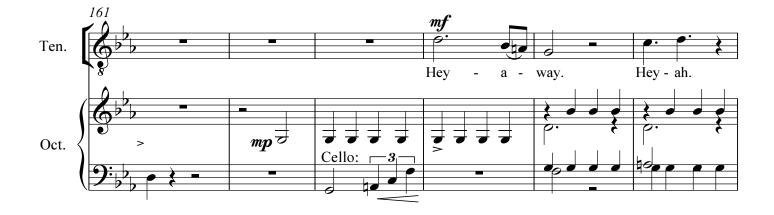
^{*}Two mountains in the Front Range of Colorado; now often called Longs Peak and Mount Meeker.

Continental Divide: 3. Vision Quest Chorus & rehearsal piano



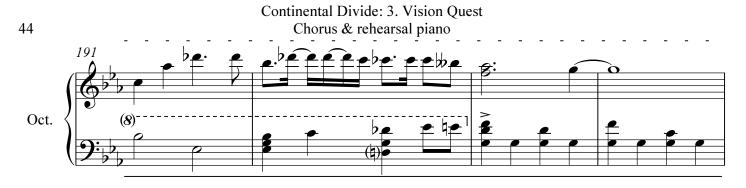


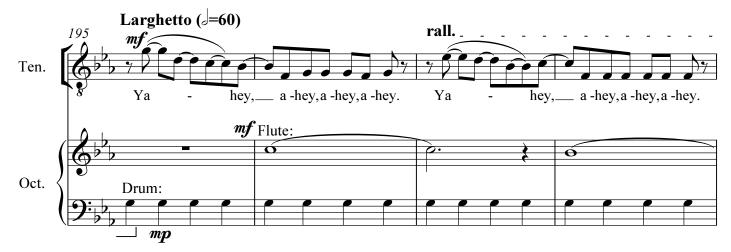


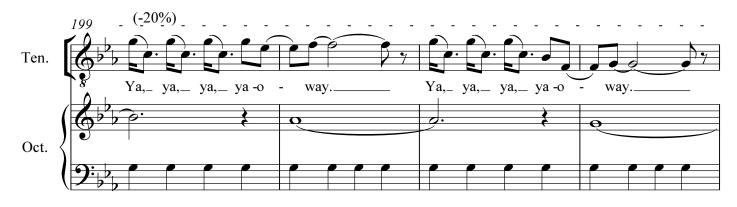


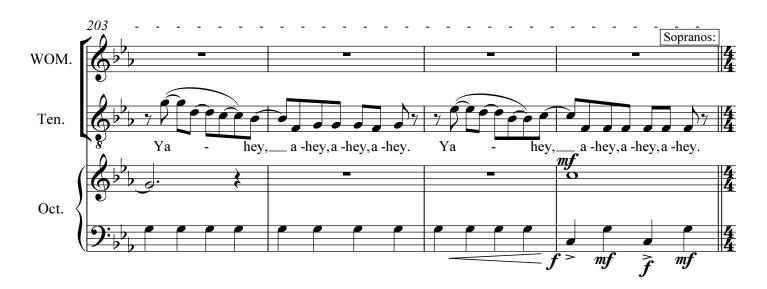
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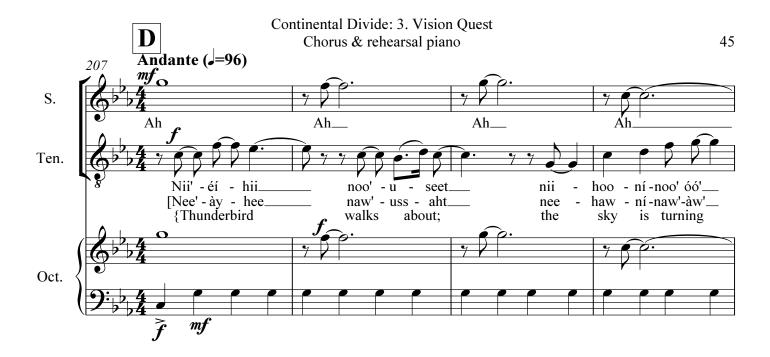


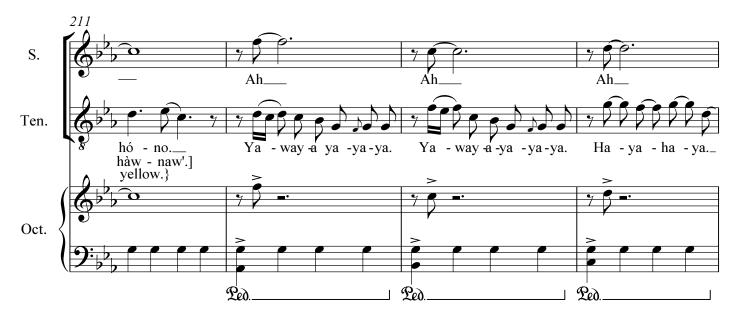


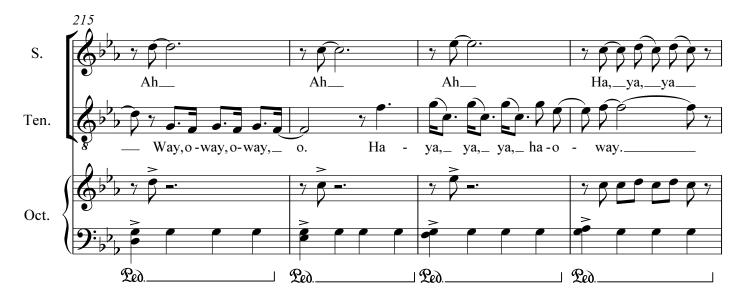


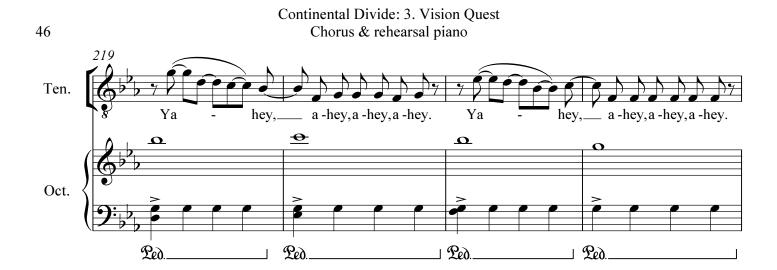


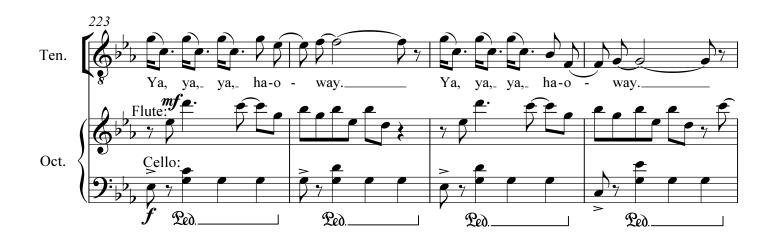


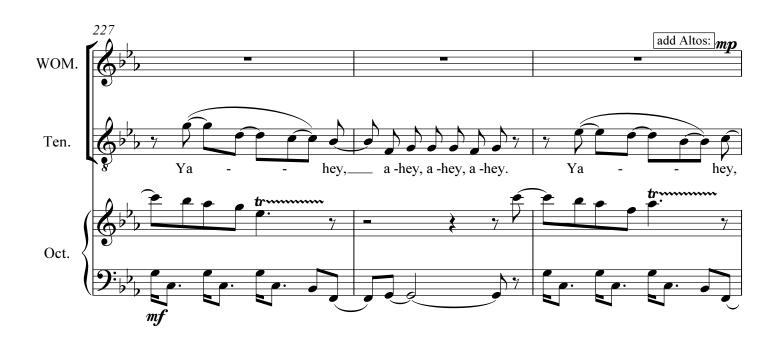


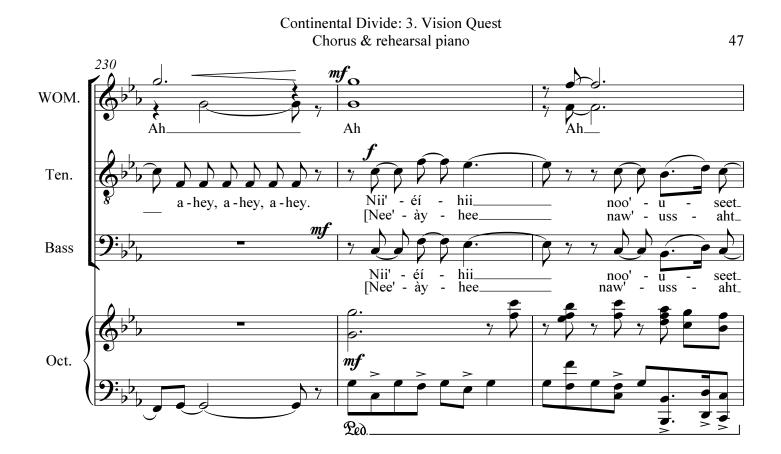


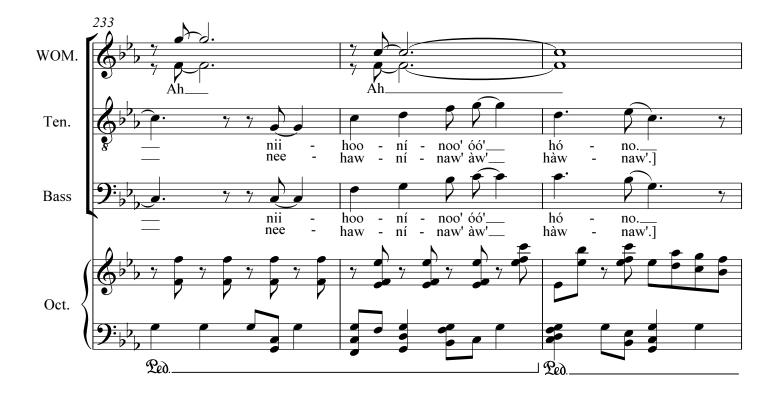
















Notes on "Vision Quest"

Source: A web page (<u>http://www.clarabaker.us/AmericanIndian/samNobleMuseum.htm</u>) by Clara Baker, Cheyenne-Arapaho Technology & Innovation Training Center, offers recordings from the collection of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. They present a skilled southern Arapaho singer and songmaker whose legal surname may be Lawrence. He mentions that he is a grandson of Chief Kou'cuuyuu Henéécee (Scarred Buffalo) on his mother's side, a grandson of Henéécee Níitóuuhu (Howling Buffalo) on his father's side, a nephew of Gloria Yuranga, the father of Nicholas Lawrence, and an uncle of Warren Sanke, Sr. He introduces and sings four traditional eagle songs. The text of the verse in the first eagle song means, "My father gave me the song of the eagle." Later, he comments that, "Arapahos aren't stingy; they're not stingy people about their songs. Anyone can sing them as long as they use them in the proper way, and show the proper respect to that song. Anybody can use that song."

Performance practice:

- 1. A good way to warm up before rehearsing this piece is to sing natural Bb-minor scales up and down (omitting Gb), and beginning each note mid-way between two drum beats.
- 2. Many singers will have to strain to reach the high and/or low F's in Eagle Song. Falsetto may be used. It is natural to sing the high notes with a tight, strained tone, and to sing the low notes with a soft, woofy tone. It is also acceptable to quietly drop out during extreme pitches; others will sing them.
- 3. Many American Indian singers use a pulsation ornament which is a bit slower (about 4 Hz; adjusted to equal 1, 2, or 4 cycles per beat) and deeper (~50 cents) than European vibrato. Recordings of authentic performances are the best guide. If the chorus is large, the director may wish to request a bit less of this ornament.
- 4. Most singers should sing the indicated vocable syllables most of the time. However, some individual variation is normal (except in the meaningful verses).
- 5. Because the musicians symbolically represent the Arapaho nation during the Eagle Song segment, it would be proper for them to observe the Arapaho tradition of standing for this song (up to rehearsal B). Of course, the cellist must sit to play. And, as the audience is typically mostly composed of other tribes, they are not expected to stand.
- 6. Because of the strong leadership of the drum, it is probably not necessary to conduct during the Eagle Song segment. (The drum varies in dynamic, but never in tempo, until rehearsal B.) Conducting is needed for the rest of the piece.

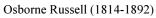
Philosophy of this piece:

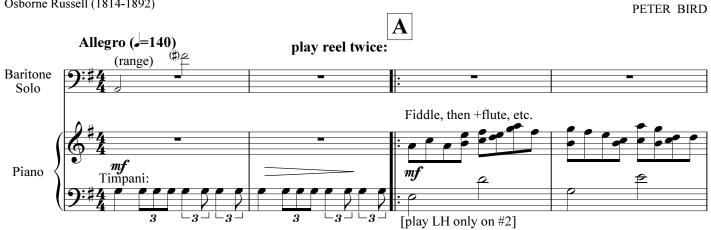
Some may object that it is incorrect to add other instruments or non-melody notes to a traditional song like Eagle Song. I see these songs as analogous to the European liturgical plainchants that were codified 14 centuries ago under Pope Gregory I. Some churchmen were probably offended in the 9th century when these began to be accompanied and harmonized, and in fact this debate still continues. But 12 centuries of beautiful (and still sacred) music have resulted from those innovations.

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To O. R.: mountain man, settler, judge, & triumvir of Oregon Territory

Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell

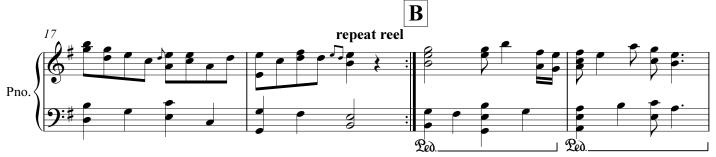




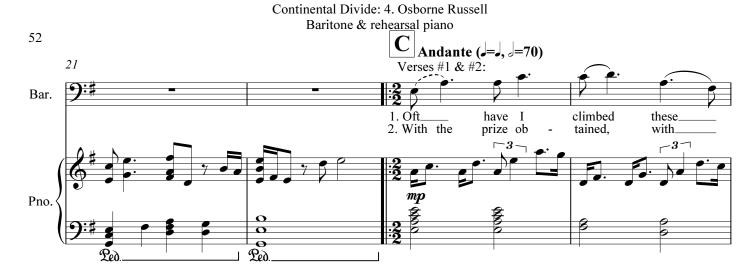


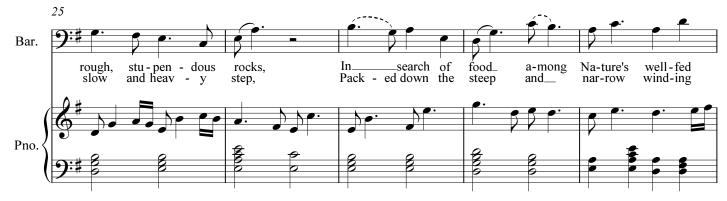


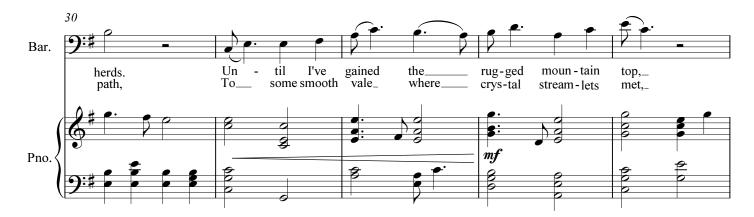


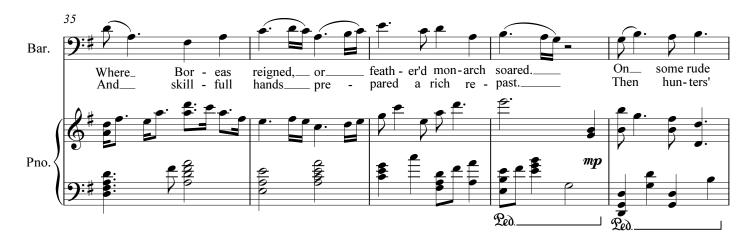


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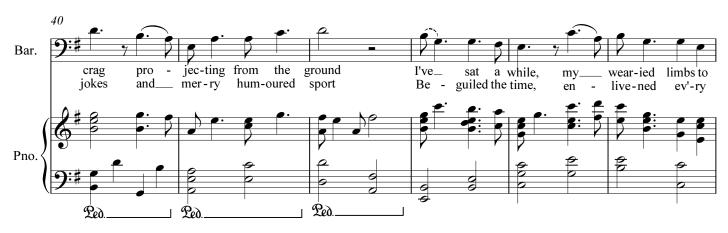


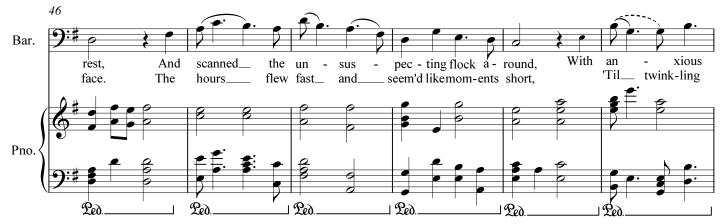






Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell Baritone & rehearsal piano









Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell Baritone & rehearsal piano









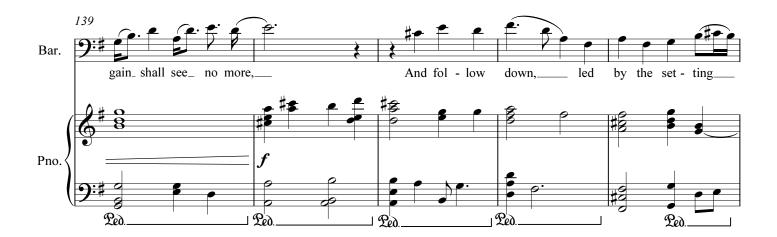
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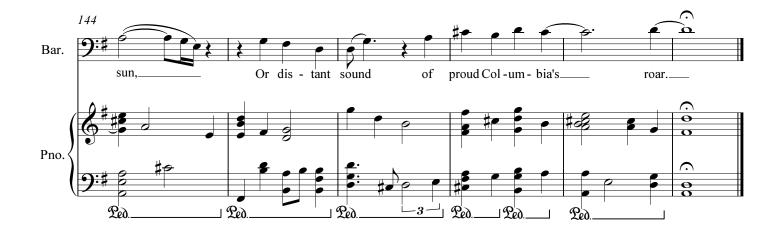




Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell Baritone & rehearsal piano







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Chorus & rehearsal piano

Peter Bird (Oregon);

To Charles Ives



Nathan Barker (fl. 1849: Ho! for California); PETER BIRD (Oregon, All is Well)

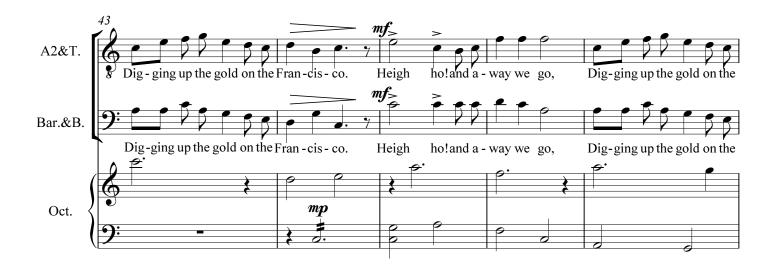


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Continental Divide: 5. South Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano



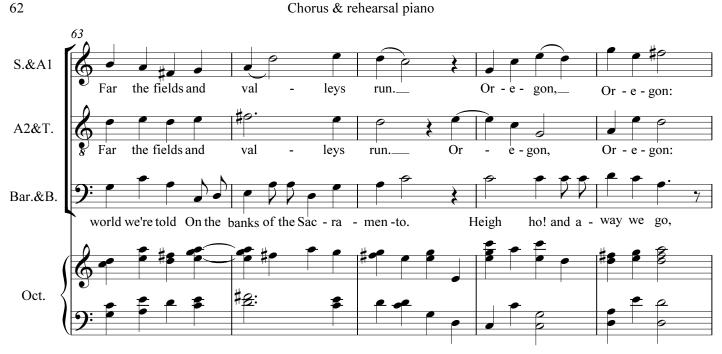




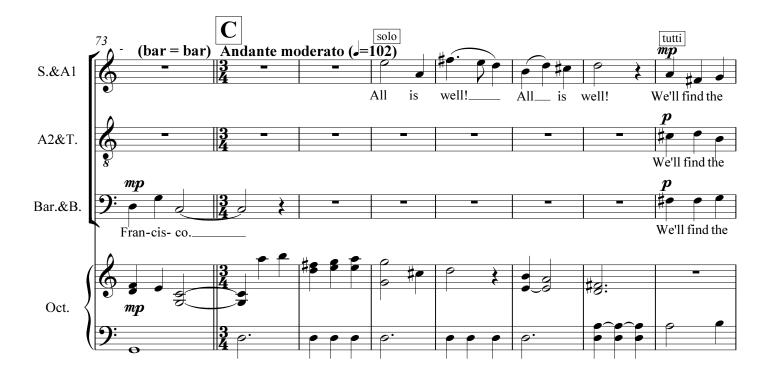
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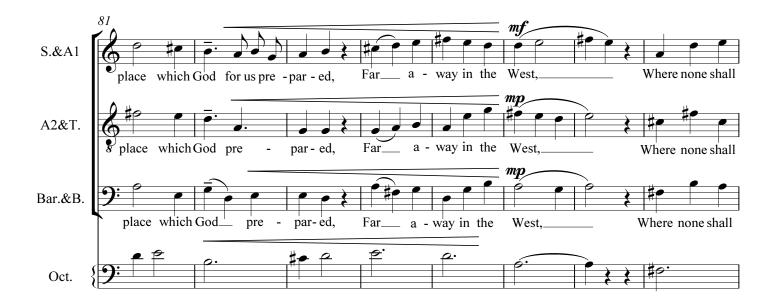


Continental Divide: 5. South Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano







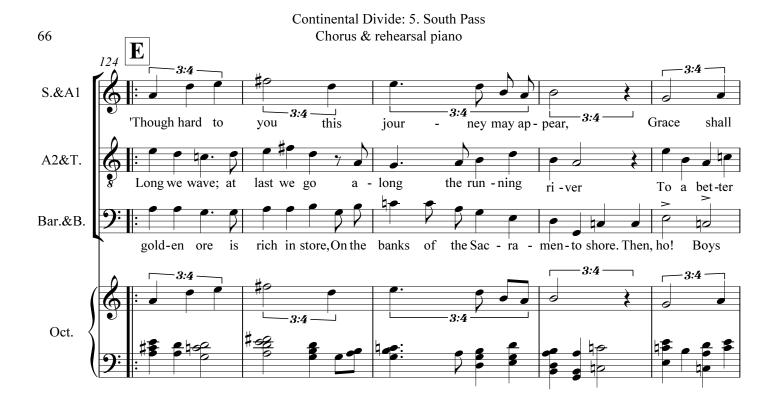


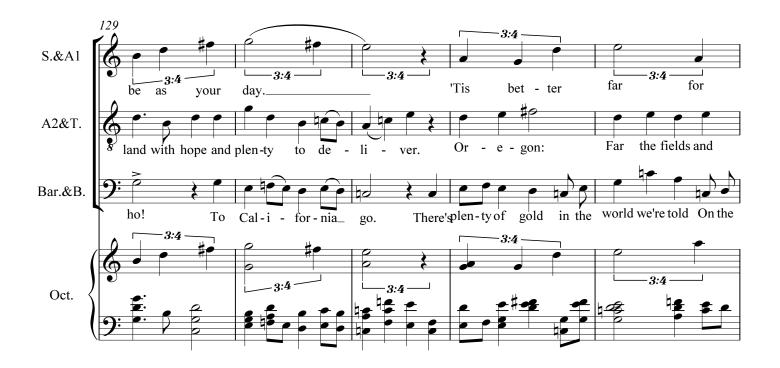


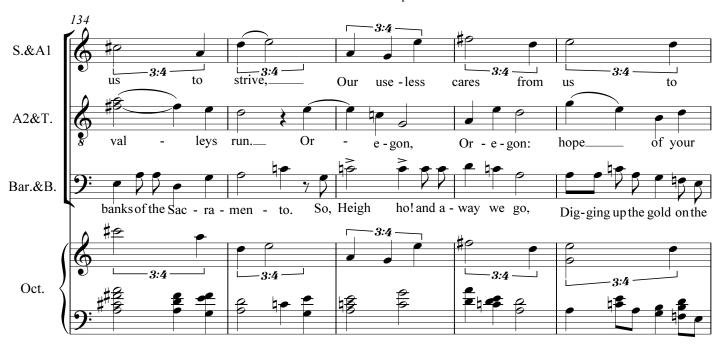


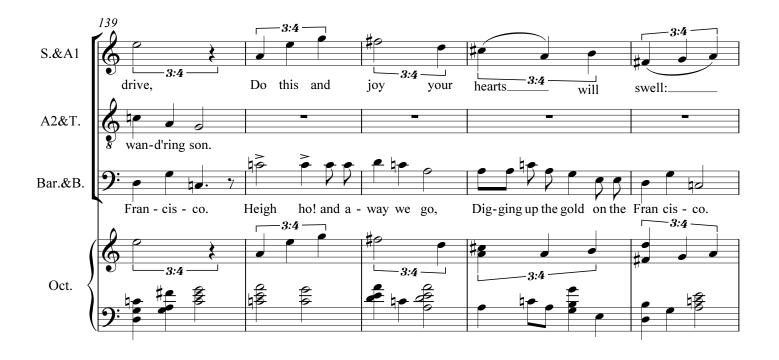


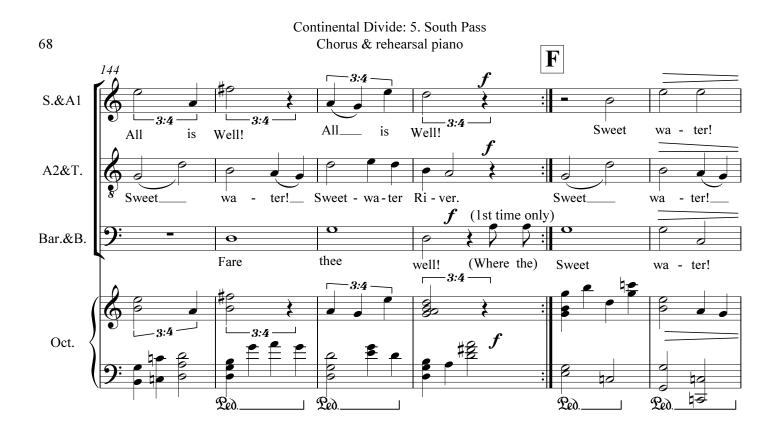




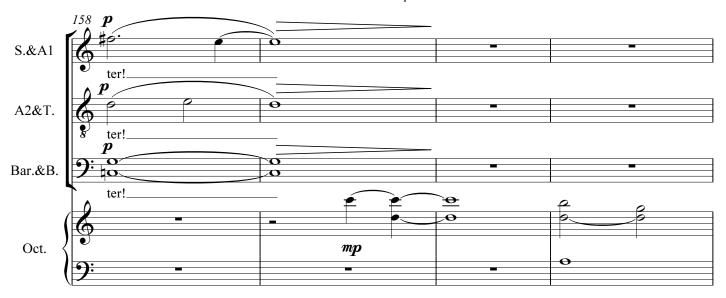


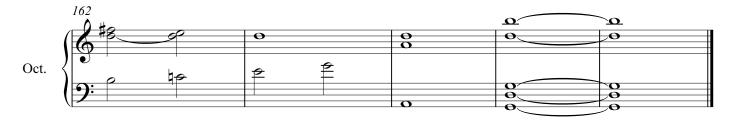












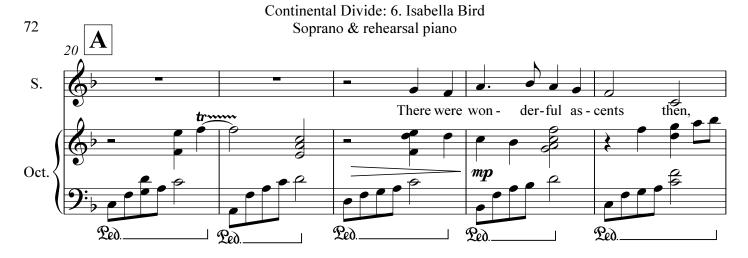
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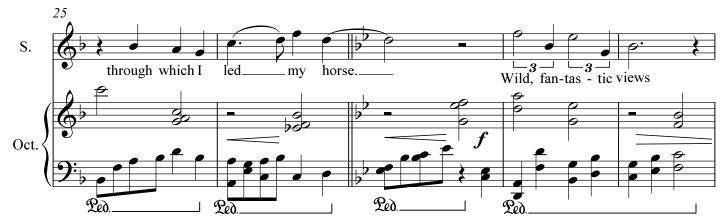
Soprano & rehearsal piano

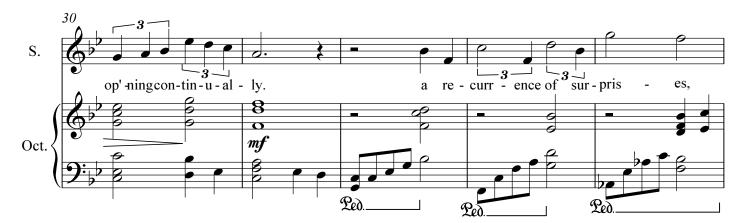
To ILB, world traveller, writer, natural historian, & Fellow RGS

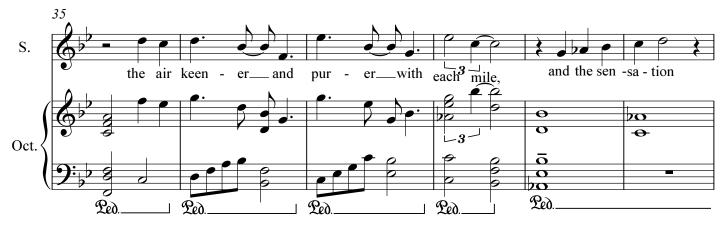


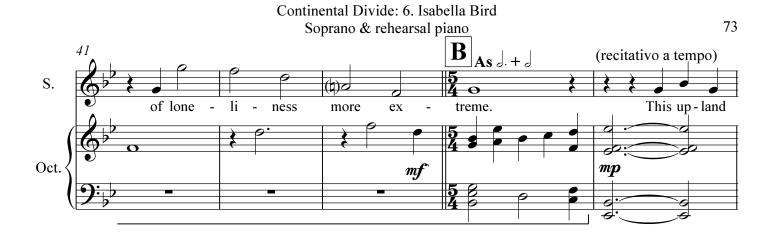
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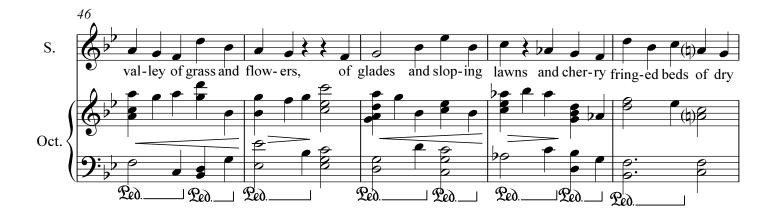


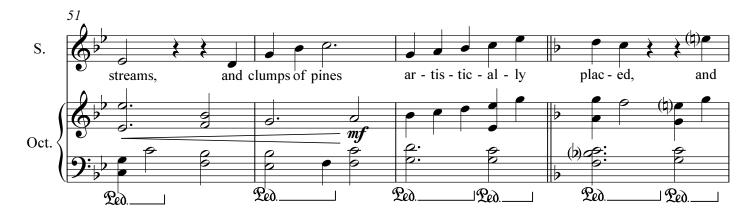


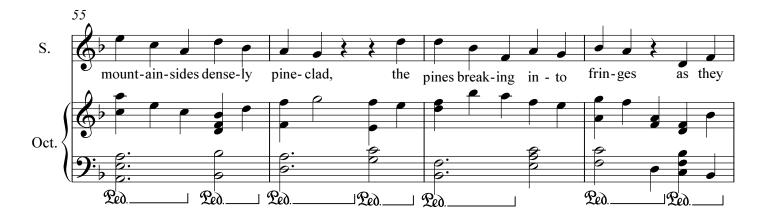








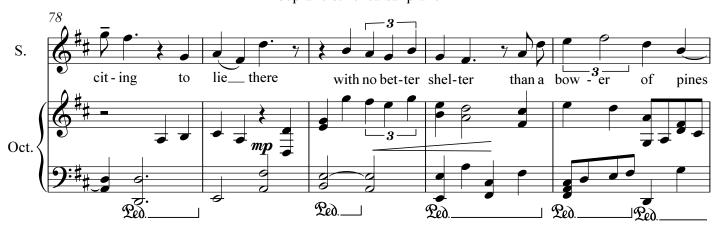


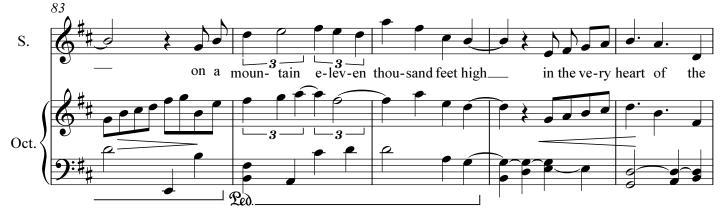


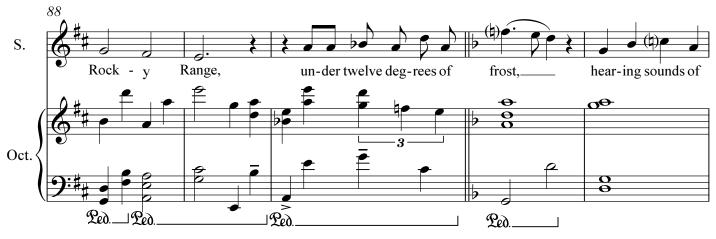
Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano

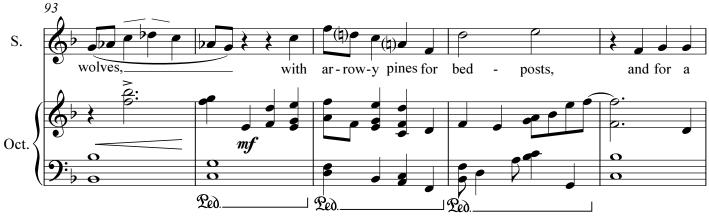


Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano



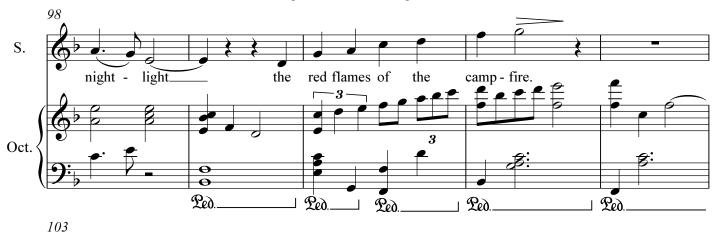






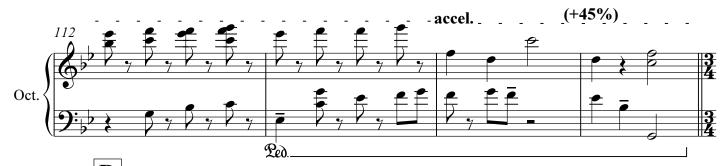
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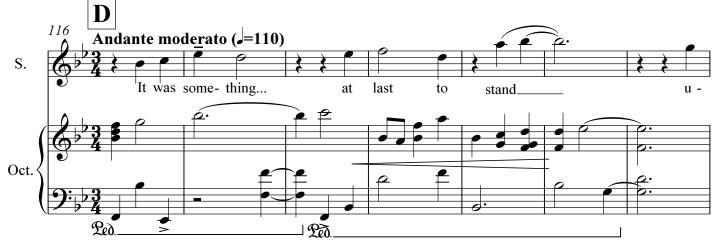
Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano





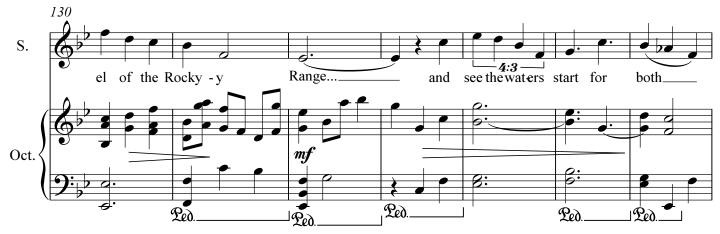


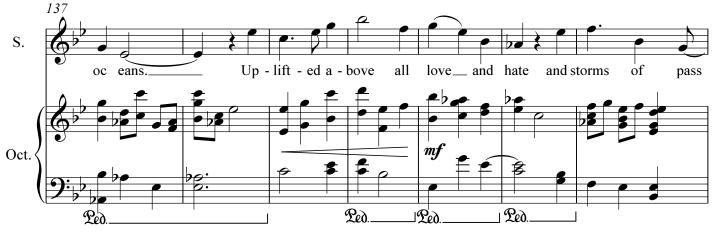


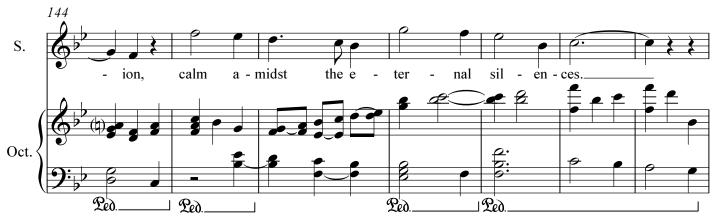


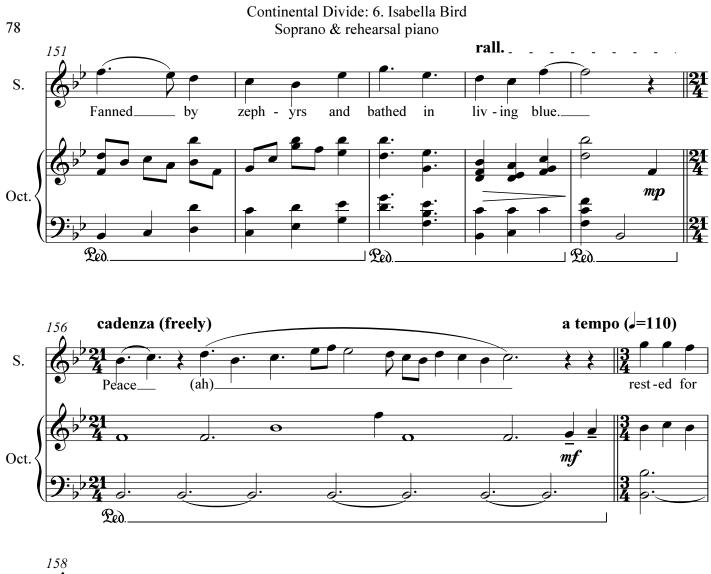
Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano

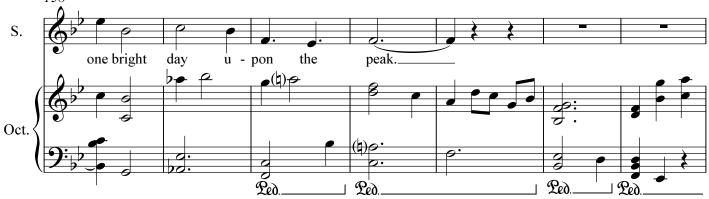




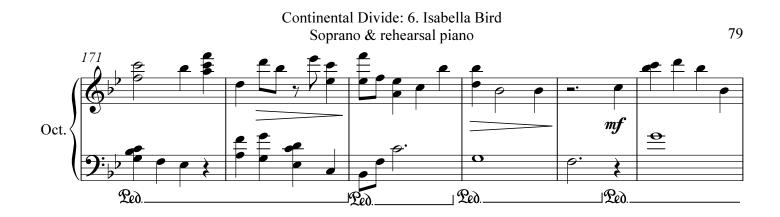




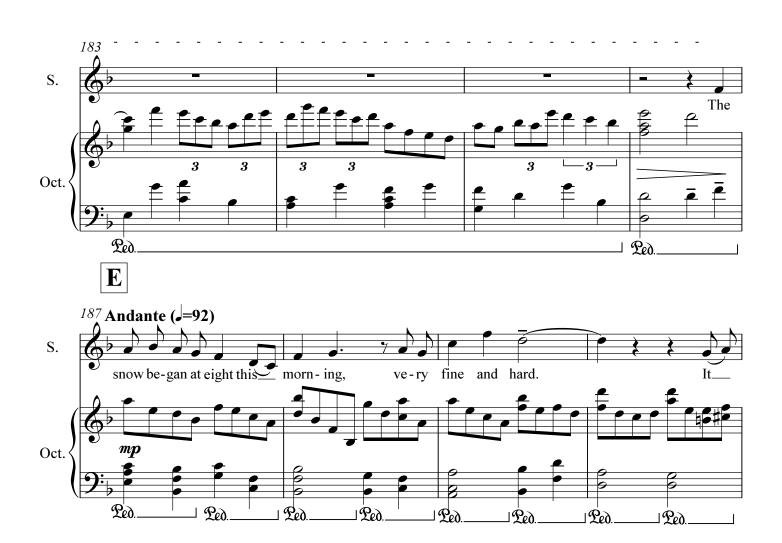












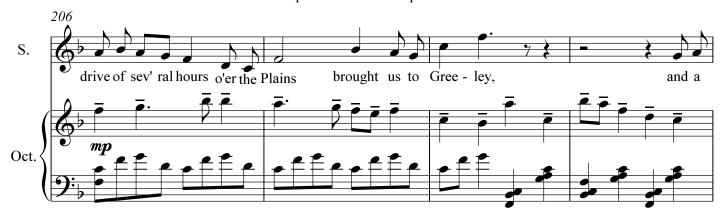
Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano

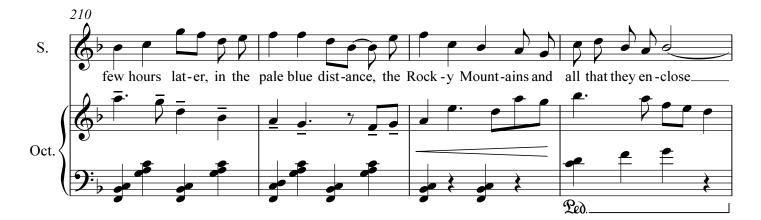


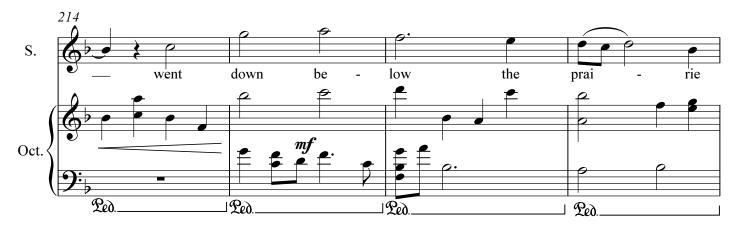


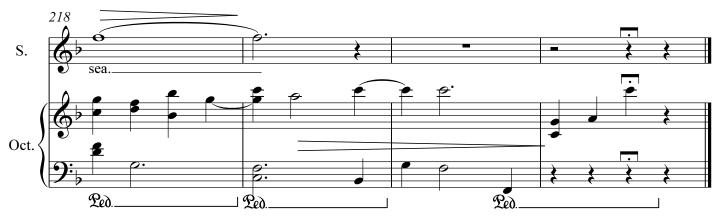


Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird Soprano & rehearsal piano

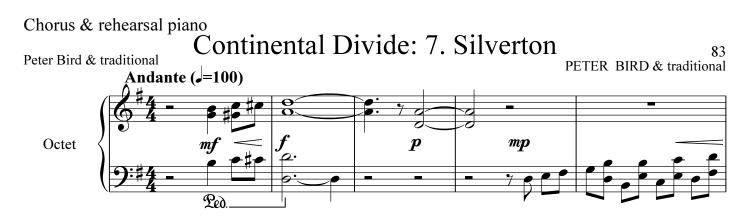








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Continental Divide: 7. Silverton Chorus & rehearsal piano



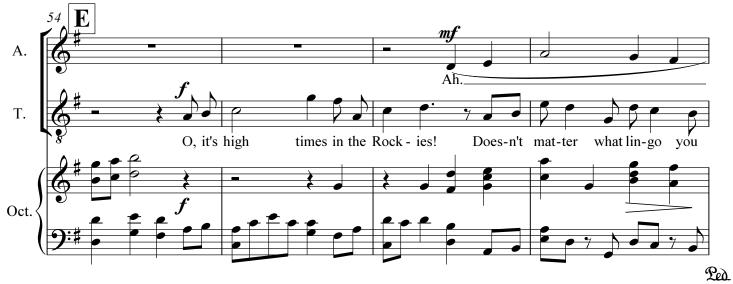




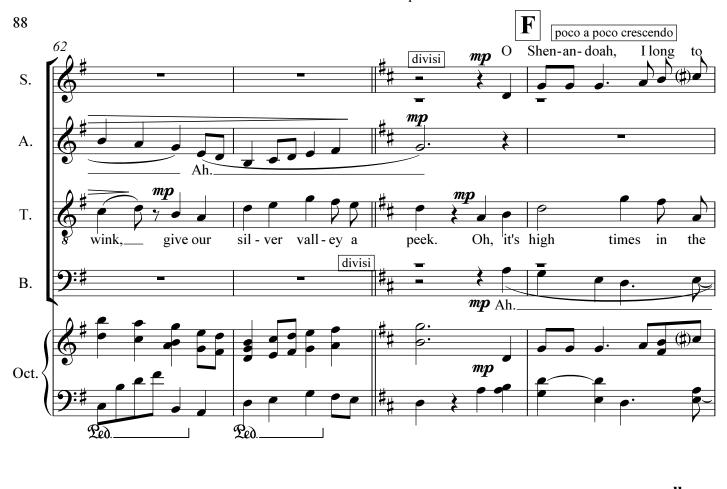
Continental Divide: 7. Silverton Chorus & rehearsal piano



Continental Divide: 7. Silverton Chorus & rehearsal piano









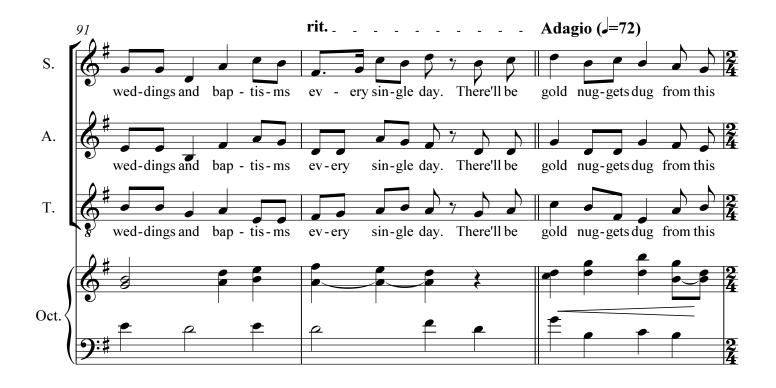
Continental Divide: 7. Silverton Chorus & rehearsal piano





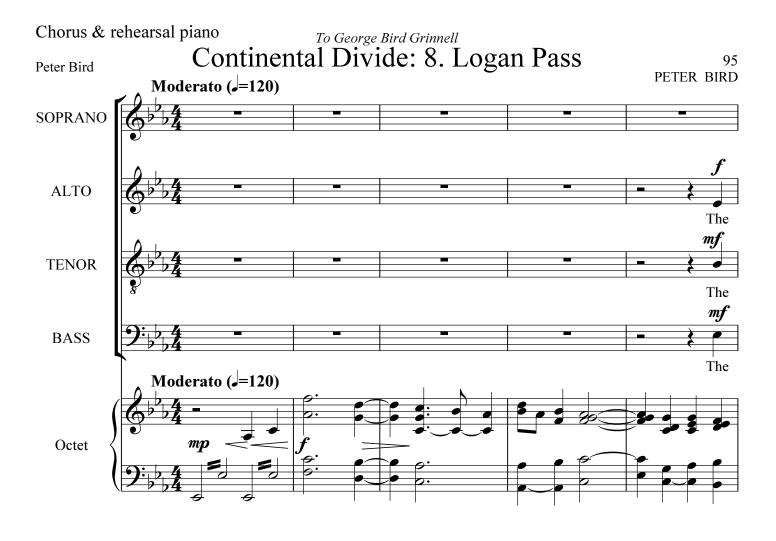


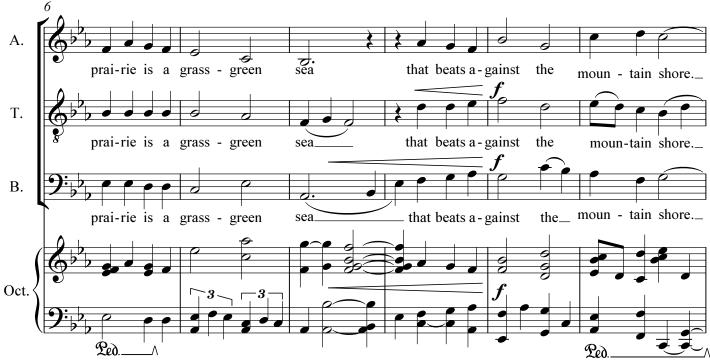






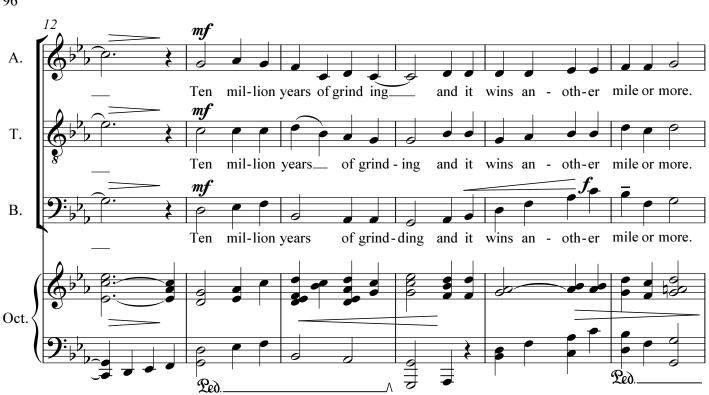
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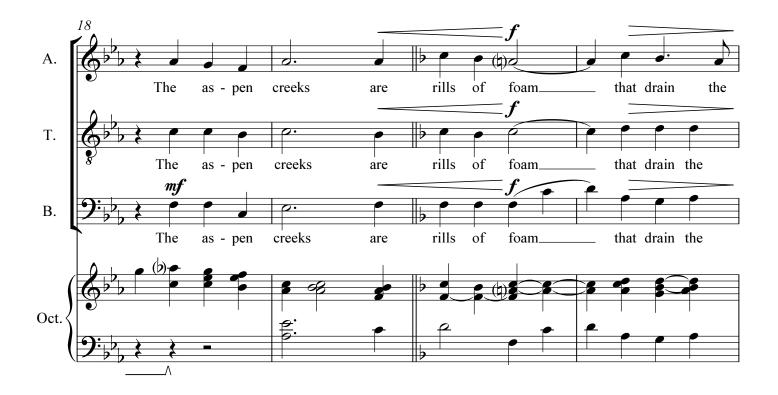




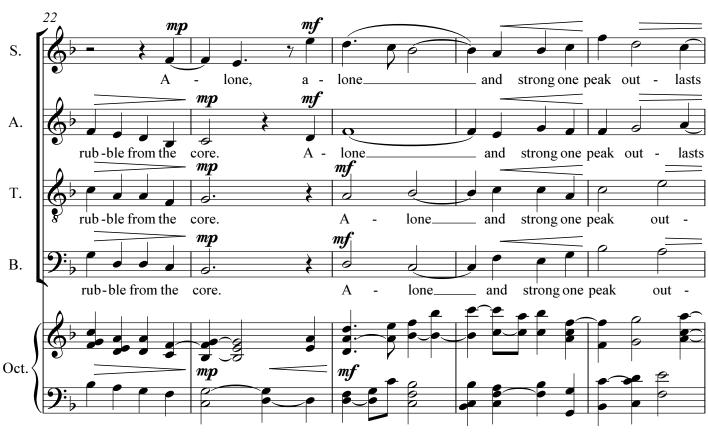
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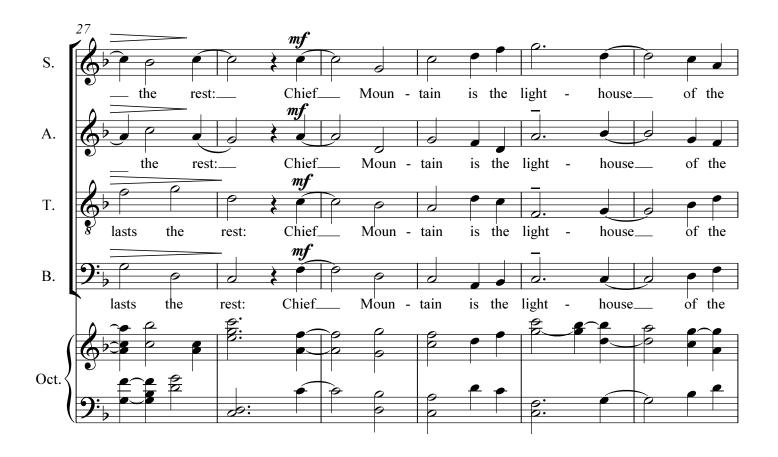
Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano



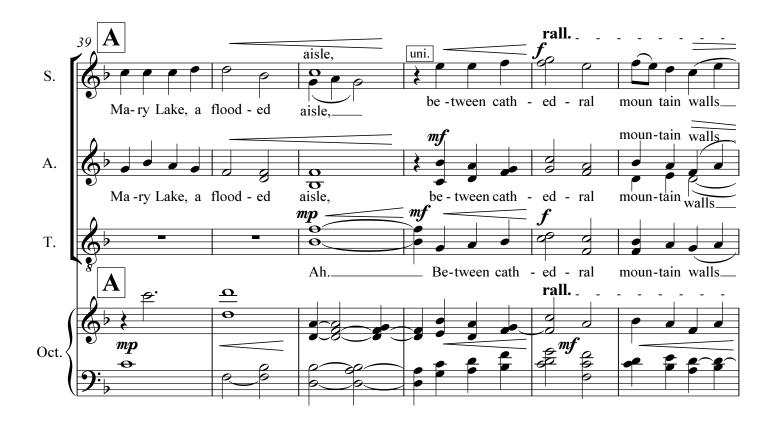


Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano

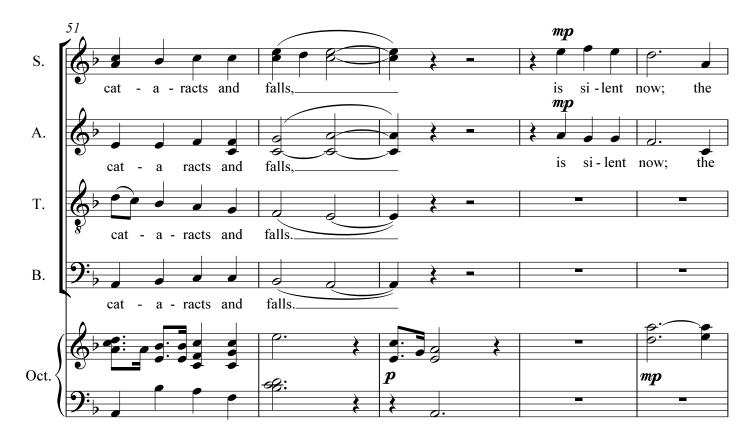






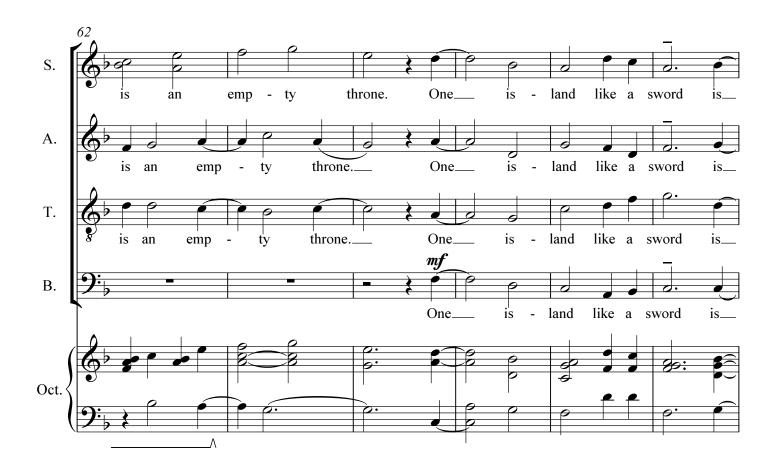






Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano











Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano





Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass Chorus & rehearsal piano





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