

I WONDER AS I WANDER

John Jacob Niles

Brad Hansen
arranger

PROGRAM NOTES

About the Music

In 1933 American folklorist John Jacob Niles first heard *I Wonder As I Wander*, sung by a young Appalachian woman named Annie Morgan. He transcribed a few lines of the melody and lyrics, extended this material to four lines and three stanzas, and copyrighted it. It was published by G. Schirmer in 1934 in *Songs of the Hill-folk*. This arrangement differs in many ways from the Niles version. It is in 4/4 time, reharmonized liberally with altered chords, and features a brooding original piano part. The sopranos present the first verse, accompanied and completed by the full choir. Tenors take the second stanza, with linear counterpoint in the upper voices. The full ensemble sings the third stanza, with an obbligato line in the piano. The first verse is reprised a capella, and the piece ends plaintively. In rehearsals we paid close attention to dynamics at the end of each stanza, as emphasis is placed on alternating vocal parts.

It is drawn from Hansen's *Medley of Carols*. All arrangements in the medley feature the piano as an equal partner with the choir. The harmonic language is jazz oriented, cast in asymmetrical and mixed meters, with swing and Latin rhythms. The pieces are suitable for High School, College, and Community choirs.

Vocal Ranges S: D4 – G5 A: B♭3 – C5 T: C3 – F4 B: F2 – G3. **Duration** approx. 5' 15".

Lyrics

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus, the Savior, had come for to die
For poor ord'nry people, like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus, twas in a cow's stall
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all,
But high in God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages, it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,
He surely could have it for He was the king.

About the Composer

Brad Hansen is a pianist, composer, and Professor Emeritus at Portland State University where he teaches Theory and Composition. He previously taught at Ole Miss, Humboldt State (CA), and Ball State (IN). Hansen studied at Berklee, Grinnell, Cincinnati Conservatory, University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Oregon. His instrumental and choral works have been performed worldwide. The Oregon Regional Arts and Culture Council awarded him a grant to stage the *Medley of Carols* in 2025, sung by the PSU Chamber Choir and accompanied by Darrell Grant.

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John Jacob Niles
Appalachian Carol

I Wonder As I Wander

Arranged by Brad Hansen
for SSATTB Voices and Piano

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Andantino ♩ = 86

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Piano

Andantino ♩ = 86

mp

5

mp

p

Un - der the sky_ I won - der why_ I won - der

p

Un - der the sky_ won - der why_ I won - der

p

Un - der the sky_ won - der why_ I won - der

mp

Un - der the sky_ won - der why_

11

mf

why. I won - der as I wan - der out un - der the sky How Je - sus, the

pp

why. Aah Aah Aah

pp

why. Aah Aah Aah

p

Aah Aah Aah

p

17

Sa - vior, had come for to die For poor ord - 'nry peo - ple, like you and like

Aah Aah Aah

Aah Aah Aah

Aah Aah Aah

Aah Aah Aah