

J O A N S Z Y M K O

WORDS

for treble chorus

&

piano

JOAN SZYMKO (b.1957)

Joan Szymko's choral music is regularly performed at regional, national and international choral festivals, competitions and conferences. Utilizing a familiar music vocabulary, she creates works that are nonetheless fresh and engaging; compelling and inspiring, her text selections are as notable as her music. Szymko is widely recognized as a foremost American composer of exceptional repertoire for women's choir. The American Choral Director's Association recognized Szymko's lasting impact on the choral arts in America by selecting her as the recipient of the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission in 2010.

Joan Szymko lives and works in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. As resident composer she enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with Portland based Do Jump! Movement Theater, (1995-2012) creating vocal underscoring for major touring productions. A dynamic conductor, she has served on the choral music faculty of Portland State University (2013-15) and has led Aurora Chorus as Artistic Director since 1993. As a visiting artist, Szymko workshops her compositions with choirs in a variety of educational and festival settings across the country and abroad. For more info visit www.joanszymko.com.

WORDS

*Why do you hate me?
Why do you shun me?
Why do you laugh when I break down and cry?
Why won't you help me
when they're all making fun of me?
Why won't you stick up for me
when they're shouting and whispering
and texting and posting their lies?*

*"So fat,
so ugly,
so worthless
— so gay.
Hey loser, hey stupid—
you should just go away."*

*Words kill. (so mean, so heartless, so cruel)
Words can kill.
I've tried hard
but I can't will them to stop. I've tried hard,
but my heart and my body are scarred.
And I'm afraid
I've begun to believe what your words
say about me.
Tell me, what do your words
say about you?*

PROGRAM NOTES

Having accepted the opportunity provided by Chorus America to write for young people, I wanted to compose something that would be relevant that might have a positive impact on the lives of those singing this commissioned work. I elected to focus on bullying, which has reached epidemic proportions in our schools and on-line culture. As I researched the real life consequences of bullying, I vowed to evoke a spirit of empathy, not with sugar-coated niceties, but with unedited emotions, real taunts and fears. While searching for lyrics, I read many heartbreaking poems by young people who had been bullied. Sadly, most were much too raw in content to use for this choral project; and so I opted to write the lyrics myself.

"WORDS" attempts to both reveal and to reach three distinct groups: the bullied, the bullies, and the bystanders who enable bullying by doing nothing. The first and last stanzas come from the perspective of the bullied, with the first addressing the bystander, and the last addressing the bully. The middle stanza is comprised of a bully's taunts. The 'question' motif returns in the piano at the ending. But the final question is for the bully: after hearing the consequences of their cruel words and actions, the bully is asked to examine themselves, and how their words reflect their inner being.

STAGING

So as to avoid one set of singers being identified solely as "BULLY" and others only as "BULLIED" it is important that the staging provided below be utilized in performance. This staging is intended to reinforce identification with all the parties involved, and hopefully will facilitate an empathetic response from all who sing and all who listen.

1. Beginning: all singers facing forward, heads bowed.
2. Ms. 4-7: the 2 halves of the chorus raise heads gently in time to sing their respective lines. Ms. 8-18: all singers are facing forward.
3. Rehearsal B: all singers turn bodies 45° upstage- group split at center: stage R turn to right / stage L to left. Small group moves downstage during Ms. 19-20 piano riff in order to deliver the lines at Ms. 21-27.
4. M. 29: split groups (from risers) move in unison to face forward in time to sing their respective lines; at M33 remainder of choir moves so as to be facing forward by M33 for tutti. *Full choir now the BULLY.*
5. M41: still facing forward (original small group having rejoined group) each singer SLOWLY crosses arms, as if hugging oneself, hunching slightly. All heads are bowed slightly in a "protective stance." *Choir has now morphed from BULLY back to BULLIED.*
6. M43 on fermata: start release of self-hug. By M48 all singers standing fully upright, arms at side.

Jointly commissioned by a consortium of choruses* to benefit the programs and services of Chorus America

WORDS

words and music
by Joan Szymko

♩=♩ throughout
♩=70 *Plaintive*

8^{va}

Pno

mf

mp

4 [half the chorus] [the other half]

S
A

mp

Why do you hate me? Why do you shun me?

p *mp* *mp*

for perusal only

8 Tutti Altos

S
A

mf *p*

Why do you laugh when I break down and cry? Why won't you help me?___

mf *mp* *p*

for perusal only

*view consortium participants on back page

poco accel.

11 Tutti SA *mp*

S Why won't you help me when they're all ma - king

A Why won't you help me when they're all ma - king

mp

poco accel.

13 *mf* $\text{♩} = 54$ **A** with growing indignation *f*

S fun of me? Why won't you stick up for me when they're shout-ing and

A fun of me? Why won't you stick up for me when they're

mf *mf*

for perusal only

cresc. *f*

$\text{♩} = 54$ **A**

15 **poco rall.**

S whis-per-ing, shout-ing and whis-p'ring and text-ing and post-ing their

A whis-per-ing, lies, lies, lies, post-ing their

f

poco rall.

17 $\text{♩} = 70$ **B**

S A

lies?

$\text{♩} = 70$
agressive, driving **B**

21 *brashly* 3 singers **mp** **mf**

S "So fat, "so fat, so ug-ly, so worth-less— so

A 3 singers **mp** **mf** so worth-less— so

for perusal only

26 **add 1/2 choir** **mf** **mf**

S — gay. — So fat, so ug-ly,— so fat,

A — gay. — so ug-ly.— so fat,

31 *Tutti*

S so ug - ly, so worth - less — so gay.

A so ug - ly, so worth - less — so gay.

35 *ringing* *f*

S Hey — lo - ser! Lo - ser! You should just go a -

A Hey lo - ser! Lo - ser! You should just go a -

for perusal only

39 *rit.*

S way!"

A *rit.*

mp *dim.*

mf

as if to soothe oneself

Slowly ♩=54

rit.

clearly, focused

7

42

S *mp*

A *mp* Hm

mp Hm

C A tempo *p*

Words kill.

Words kill.

Slowly ♩=54

mp *mf* *mp*

C A tempo *mp*

mf

46

S *mp* *mp*

A *mp*

Words can kill. I've tried hard but I can't

Words can kill. Words kill.

for perusal only

mp *mp*

accel.

accel.

p *mp*

54

S *mf*

A *mf*

will them to stop. I've tried hard but my heart and my bo - dy are

So mean, so heart-less, so cruel, but my heart and my bo - dy are

♩=54

♩=54

mf

59 *with growing agitation* **D** *f*

S
scarred_____ and I'm a - fraid I've be-gun to be-lieve what your words say a -

A
scarred_____ and I'm a - fraid I've be-gun to be-lieve what your words say a -

cresc. **D** *f*

for perusal only

61 *mf*

S
bout me.____ I'm a - fraid I've be-gun to be-lieve, I'm a - fraid

A
bout me.____ I'm a - fraid I've be-gun to be-lieve, I'm a - fraid

mp *f*

64 Tutti Unison *vulnerably* **E** *p* rit. *mf*

S A I'm a - fraid I've be-gun to be-lieve what your words say a - bout me. _____

E rit.

68 $\text{♩} = 70$

S A

$\text{♩} = 70$
8^{va}

for perusal only

72 *Meno mosso*

S *with resolve* *mp* *p* *pp*

A *mp* *p* *pp*

What do your words say a - bout you? _____

What do your words say a - bout you? _____

(8) *Meno mosso*

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