

Annotated List of Multi-movement Eco-choral Works by North American Composers

In an effort to promote environmental choral music as a programming option, the following list of works is intended as a reference tool for conductors. The selection has been limited to larger works, either lengthy single movement compositions or multi-movement pieces.

This list was compiled through a selection process that included a review of online catalogues, composer webpages, repertoire suggestions from colleagues, and previously encountered repertoire from my own experience in the field. The list is organized chronologically according to premiere date, with each entry organized as follows:

Title

Composer

Premiere

Publisher and date of publication

Text

Voicing

Instrumentation

Approximate duration

Difficulty*

Comments

* The difficulty ratings are based on my professional assessment of accessibility for choirs with different skill sets. The Easy rating suggests that the work would be suitable for a capable high school, college, or community choir. Works rated as Medium are recommended for advanced high school and youth choirs, intermediate college choirs, and skilled community choruses. Works rated as Advanced are recommend for advanced college and community choirs as well as professional ensembles.

Missa Gaia

Composer: Paul Winter, Jim Scott, Paul Halley, Oscar Castro-Neves, Kim Oler

Premiere: 1981, Paul Winter Consort and Cathedral Choir of St. John the Divine, NYC

Publisher: Hal Leonard (1981)

Text: Latin Mass, St. Francis of Assisi, newly composed

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: soprano sax, English horn, cello, guitar, piano, organ, percussion

Approximate duration: 35' (variable)

Difficulty: Easy

Comments: This seven-movement work can be supplemented by additional improvisations and choral works by Paul Halley. The work requires the use of the accompanying sound cue recording, which includes animal sounds for several movements. The text retains the original Latin, with additional nature texts by St. Francis, including “Canticle of Brother Sun,” which acts as a refrain throughout the work. Winter was inspired to write this work after immersing himself in the study of animal welfare: “I came to realize that celebrating the beauty of the living creatures was a more effective

strategy to move people than depicting the horror. The best way to raise awareness about the magic of the vocalizations was to find a vocalization we could interplay with, so the actual voices of the creatures were woven in with the music – in a sense we were collaborating with these creatures.”

<https://paulwinter.com/earth-music/>

Love Songs for a Small Planet

Composer: Alexina Louie

Premiere: 1989, Vancouver Chamber Choir

Publisher: Theodore Front (1989), revised version (2007) available through CMC

Text: Traditional texts from Hawaii, Africa, Sioux (translated into English)

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: harp, percussion

Approximate duration: 18’

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: This four-movement work is divided into four movements: Introduction-Night, I. Sun, II. Moon, III. Earth. The harp plays a major role in this work, with extended solo sections. “Extremely moved by their powerful love and respect for nature,” Louie sets four distinct texts, using the harp and colorful percussion to help evoke the poetry and four distinct landscapes. The final movement also calls for four soloists from the choir to blow into empty glass bottles, which adds to the “hocket-like” rhythmic texture.

<https://cmccanada.org/shop/14342/>

Celtic Mass for the Sea

Composer: Scott MacMillan

Premiere: 1991, Halifax Camerata Singers

Publisher: self-published

Text: Jennyfer Brickenden

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: string orchestra, Celtic ensemble (harp, pipes, mandolin, fiddle, guitar)

Approximate duration: 60'

Difficulty: Easy

Comments: Reminiscent of Paul Winter's *Missa Gaia* in that it is highly influenced by folk music, MacMillan's *Celtic Mass* is divided into nine movements. The work is structured after the traditional mass, including two added liturgical movements, title "First Reading" and "Second Reading." The use of traditional Celtic instruments, combined with the string orchestra, creates a unique texture that might make this piece more accessible to a wider audience. The text does not retain the Latin words, but instead uses newly composed texts that retain the general essence of the original Latin meaning, but using references to nature instead. Although the majority of the text is in English, there are several sections that are written in Gaelic. MacMillan's work continues to have annual performances throughout Canada, with the hope that the piece will "bring awareness of our oceans and their intrinsic importance to the welfare of the ecology of our home, earth."

<https://www.scott-macmillan.ca/product/celtic-mass-for-the-sea/>

Missa Gaia

Composer: Libby Larsen

Premiere: 1992, Schola Cantorum, Palo Alto, CA

Publisher: ECS Publishing (1999)

Text: Bible, Chinook Psalter, Native American poets Joy Harjo and Maurice Kenny, medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, and M.K. Dean, Wendell Berry, Gerard Manley Hopkins

Voicing: SATB and SSA (opt.)

Instrumentation: oboe, string quartet, piano four-hands, percussion

Approximate duration: 35'

Difficulty: Easy- Medium

Comments: This work is divided into six movements, which includes the five sections of the ordinary mass as well as an introit. Although the title of each movement uses the Latin mass movement, the sung text is compiled from a variety of sacred and secular sources. On Larsen's website, she explains the importance of circles in this work: "The theme of circles permeates the entire work. The music uses the circle of fifths both as a melodic theme and as an instrumental motive. Although I have not asked the oboe to do so in this work, the oboist is one of the few instrumentalists who can breathe circularly. The string quartet traditionally sits in a semi-circle. The image of the circle is central to many of the texts of this work."

<https://libbylarsen.com/works/missa-gaia-mass-for-the-earth/>

A Time for Life

Composer: Robert Kyr

Premiere: 2007, Cappella Romana, Portland, OR

Publisher: ECS Publishing (2007)

Text: Greek Orthodox Service of the Environment, Bible, Native American texts

Voicing: SATB and soloists (also can be sung by octet doubling as soloists)

Instrumentation: strings

Approximate duration: 55'

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: Labeled by Kyr as “An Environmental Oratorio,” the Capella Roman website describes this work as exploring “the urgent issue of ecological crisis caused by humanity’s inability to live in harmony with the natural world.”

(<https://cappellaromana.org/product/time-life-robert-kyr/>) This rumination on our current ecological crisis makes use of the Greek Orthodox Service of the Environment, as well as biblical passages and Native American texts. The piece provides ample opportunity for solo singing and can be performed by a larger choir with soloists or an octet doubling as soloists. The string quartet provides support and texture throughout the work, which is divided into three parts and a total of thirty-one movements. In an interview with Fanfare about this work, Kyr outlines his thoughts on how music can help address the ecological crisis: “At the deepest level of who we are, music has the power to connect us most directly with the world’s life force. For example, internally, we have a very deep appreciation of nature. It is our home, and it is that which sustains us on the planet. We sense this at a profound level, and music can connect us with those deep places of

understanding within ourselves. I hope that A Time for Life connects its listeners to the part of themselves that will initiate some meaningful action in the world in order to preserve and sustain the natural environment, wherever one lives and beyond.”

<https://conspirare.org/wp-content/uploads/Fanfare-with-Robert-Kyr-01.26.14.pdf>

Earth Songs

Composer: Stephen Chatman

Premiere: 2008, University of British Columbia Singers

Publisher: Galaxy Music (2009)

Text: Bible, George McWhirter, Robert Stephen Hawker, Zhang Jiuling,

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: orchestra (piano and organ versions also available)

Approximate duration: 22’

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: Each movement of this six-movement piece uses a different text to paint a panoramic view of nature. Bookended by a Genesis text at the beginning and Whitman’s “Smile, O Voluptuous, Cool Breath of Earth” as the final movement, the four other texts are as follows: “Earth and Sky,” “The Butterfly,” “The Waterfall” (sung in Mandarin), “Dance of the Rains” (different water-related words from ten different languages). The orchestrated version lends colorful instrumentation throughout, including traditional Chinese instruments in the fourth movement; however, the work is also available in piano or organ versions as well. The preface to the score outlines the intention of the work: “Through its marriage of words and music Earth Songs not only expresses a profound

concern for the fragility of the earth, but also exudes a joy of nature, optimism, and hope for the future for our planet. Ultimately the work is meant to inspire the global community to respect, restore, and protect the natural and human world.”

<https://www.ecspublishing.com/earth-songs-piano-choral-score.html>

Ten Thousand Rivers of Oil

Composer: Leonard Enns

Premiere: 2010, University of Guelph

Publisher: Monarda Music (2010)

Text: Bible (Micah), George Whipple

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: organ, flute, oboe, cello, timpani, percussion, harp

Approximate duration: 25'

Difficulty: Easy

Comments: Written in a straightforward tonal idiom and predominantly homophonic, *Ten Thousand Rivers of Oil* is in four movements: I. “With what shall I come” from Micah 6:6,7, II. “The price of oil” by George Whipple from *Swim Class and Other Poems*; III. “Evolution” by George Whipple from *The Colour of Memory and Other Poems*; IV. “O people” based on Micah 6:8. The title of the piece comes from the passage from Micah, referencing an offering to God. According to a YouTube interview of Leonard Enns conducted by the Orpheus Choir of Toronto Enns states that “It was written at that time when there was the big oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. [...] [It] is also and more deeply about the question of what offering are we bringing and to whom is that offering

being made. So, in the Old Testament text it's to God; in George Whipple's poetry we realize that's [sic] really this offering is an offering to ourselves, to our lifestyle, and I think oil can be seen as a metaphor for all kinds of things. I hate to be too specific about that. I think that's what art is. You'd like to leave that question open but it's about consumption, it's about offering..."

Cantus Borealis: Song of the Forest

Composer: Sid Robinovitch

Premiere: 2011, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and guest singers

Publisher: available through Canadian Music Center

Text: Katherine Bitney (Soundscape: Ken Gregory)

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: string orchestra, percussion, recorded tape

Approximate duration: 25'

Difficulty: Easy-Medium

Comments: In addition to the recorded, accompanying soundscape, which includes sounds of the forest such as crickets, birds, water, and wind, *Cantus Borealis* also calls for spoken narration, which punctuates the storyline throughout the piece. Robinovitch's program notes offer a concise description of the work: "The work celebrates the boreal forest of Manitoba through a multidisciplinary approach involving writing, sound, and music. The result is a new work for choir, strings and percussion called Cantus Borealis: Song of the Forest. Cantus Borealis combines music, poetry, and natural sounds, evoking the changing seasons of the Northern Forest. It begins in the late autumn as trees sway in the wind and stars

appear as "cold runes in the night sky." In the following section, the White Dragon of the North beckons to the wintry forest, foreshadowing the ominous figure of the Forest Hag. The music becomes more strident and aggressive, reflecting the Hag's dominion over the powers of life and death. The Stag, once the ruler of the forest, becomes the object of her harsh but caring justice. An instrumental interlude welcomes the gentler mood of spring, leading into the on-rushing forces of summer. The forest calls us down to the water where we witness the timeless interactions of the animal world. The Stag reappears, now transformed by the warming love of the setting sun."

<https://collections.cmccanada.org/final/Portal/Music->

[Library.aspx?component=AAEY&record=240f74a0-a076-4a19-ac2b-cbbac03c443b](https://collections.cmccanada.org/final/Portal/Music-Library.aspx?component=AAEY&record=240f74a0-a076-4a19-ac2b-cbbac03c443b)

Choral Suite from a New Eaarth

Composer: Robert Paterson

Premiere: 2012, Vermont Youth Chorus and Orchestra

Publisher: Bill Holab Music (2015)

Text: Wendell Berry, James Joyce, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: piano (orchestra version also available- see below)

Approximate duration: 14'

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: Extracted from the longer orchestral version, which also includes narrator,

Choral Suite from a New Eaarth consists of four movements, each using a text by a different poet: I. "Rough Wind," Shelley; II. "The Noise of Water," Joyce; III. "A

Timbered Choir,” Berry; IV. “There Was Time,” Wordsworth. The choral writing is direct and the poetry is in the foreground throughout the four movements. The work is inspired by Bill McKibben’s book *Eaarth*, as Paterson explains: “He states that we may as well call this new planet Eaarth, because it is still recognizable, but fundamentally different. I feel strongly that he is correct, and wanted to express this in a musical way.”

<https://robertpaterson.com/choral-suite-from-a-new-eaarth>

Landscapes and Soundscapes

Composer: R. Murry Schafer

Premiere: 2013, Coro Volante (previously Windrush Ensemble)

Publisher: N/A

Text: N/A

Voicing: SATB and SSA

Instrumentation: unaccompanied

Approximate duration: 14’

Difficulty: Medium- Advanced

Comments: One of Schafer’s final compositions, *Landscapes and Soundscapes* was written in 2010, premiered in 2013, and recently recorded by Coro Volante, conducted by Brett Scott. The six movements each depict a different landscape and capture the accompanying soundscape, utilizing most of Schafer’s distinctive devices: extended vocal techniques, graphic notation, onomatopoeia, and a desire to capture visual and aural images through music-making, or as Schafer himself describes it, “as a search for the harmonizing influence of sounds in the world about us.”

Elements

Composer: Katerina Gimon

Premiere: 2014, Laurier Singers, Waterloo, Ontario

Publisher: Cypress Choral Music (2018)

Text: un-texted

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: unaccompanied

Approximate duration: 13'

Difficulty: Easy

Comments: Elements is a piece written with a style similar to that of R. Murray Schafer.

Un-texted and replete with verbal instructions, onomatopoeic sounds, and graphic notation, these four unaccompanied movements capture the essence of earth, air, fire, water. Gimon's comments on her piece summarize the work: "*Elements* is set of choral works that abstractly depict the four classical elements and explores the wide range of capabilities of the human voice - from overtone singing, to vocal percussion, to colourful vocal timbres. *Elements* features no 'text' (at least not in the traditional sense), rather a series of syllables generated through improvisation meant to evoke the sound and energy of each element."

<https://www.katerinagimon.com/elements.html>

Inscapes

Composer: Shawn Kirchner

Premiere: 2014, Los Angeles Master Chorale

Publisher: Shawn Kirchner Publishing

Text: Gerald Manley Hopkins

Voicing: SATB.SATB

Instrumentation: unaccompanied

Approximate duration: 20'

Difficulty: Advanced

Comments: Commissioned by the Los Angeles Master Chorale, *Inscapes* is a four movement work for double choir. Kirchner describes the work as follows: "Using themes of reverence for earth's creatures and preservation of habitat, *Inscapes* is a challenging acapella work with rich harmonic language and intricately layered choral textures. Conceived as a contemporary choral "take" on the Classical instrumental sonata, *Inscapes* begins and ends with grand movements, with Scherzo and Adagio movements in between."

<https://www.shawnkirchner.com/composition/satb-concert-suites-works/inscapes/>

Terra nostra (Our Earth)

Composer: Stacey Garrop

Premiere: 2014, San Francisco Choral Society, Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir

Publisher: Theodore Presser (2020)

Text: Bible, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Wendell Berry, William Woodsworth, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walt Whitman

Voicing: SATB, children's chorus, soloists

Instrumentation: orchestra (also arranged for chamber ensemble of timpani, percussion, harp and piano four hands)

Approximate duration: 70'

Comments: Divided into three parts with multiple movements in each part and with texts by a myriad of poets and other sources, *Terra Nostra* is written in a tonal idiom that is accessible to both the performers and the audience. Garrop has a firm grasp on orchestral and choral color and techniques, making the oratorio an innovative, varied, and imaginative work. The melodic writing for soloists is beautiful and reminiscent of early 20th-century English composers, yet retains Garrop's personal voice. Garrop's program notes further clarify the intent of the work: "Terra Nostra focuses on the relationship between our planet and mankind, how this relationship has shifted over time, and how we can re-establish a harmonious balance. This concept is presented over the course of three parts. Part I: Creation of the World explores various creation myths from different cultures, culminating in a joyous celebration of the beauty of our planet. Part II: The Rise of Humanity examines the achievements of mankind, particularly since the dawn of our Industrial Age, and how these achievements have impacted the planet. Part III: Searching for Balance questions how we can create more awareness for our planet's plight, re-establish a deeper connection to it, and find a balance for living within our planet's resources."

<https://www.garrop.com/ChoralWorks/Oratorio/>

Oka' Aya'sha' (The Water Place)

Composer: Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate

Premiere: 2015, Rockefeller Chapel Choir, University of Chicago

Publisher: self-published

Text: Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate (inspired by Chickisaw language)

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: woodwinds, percussion

Approximate duration: 20'

Difficulty: Easy- Medium

Comments: Oka' Aya'sha' is a lengthy single movement work that honors the Chickisaw heritage with a newly composed text that is sung in Chickisaw. The chorus is often divided into eight parts and alternates between singing and chanting the text, with the rhythm of the percussion combining with the colors of the woodwinds to enliven the narrative. Tate's connection to his Chickisaw ancestry plays a large role in the conception of the piece: "Oka' Aya'sha' is a work inspired by my family and our original homelands, alongside the Mississippi River. This great river was a central part of our identity and is one of many very large rivers throughout the old lands of all Southeast Indians. This rhapsodic work is meant to reflect the mystery, beauty, grandeur and strength of our ancient home, the Aboriginal South."

<https://jerodtate.com/compositions/>

Canticles of the Holy Wind

Composer: John Luther Adams

Premiere: 2017, The Crossing

Publisher: Taiga Press (2013)

Text: N/A

Voicing: SATB.SATB.SATB.SATB

Instrumentation: percussion played by singers

Approximate duration: 75'

Difficulty: Advanced

Comments: *Canticles of the Holy Wind* consists of fourteen movements and ruminates on three interrelated subjects: wind, sky, and birds. The contrasts between the sky, wind, and bird movements create a vivid and spacious tapestry of color and sound, challenging and thrilling, but also meditative and calming. In the linear notes to the 2017 recording, Adams shares the following thoughts: “Throughout my life, I’ve clung to hope for the future of our species. But amid the gathering darkness of our own making – global warming, terrorism and seemingly unending wars, widespread social and economic injustice, rampant greed and environmental destruction, resurgent racism and rising fascism – it’s increasingly difficult to maintain unmitigated faith in humanity. And I find myself reimagining hope. I don’t look for answers in political ideology, humanistic philosophy, or religious dogma. Instead I place my faith in the land and the skies, the wind and the birds – in what we call “nature”. And I take comfort in a larger vision of the earth and the universe, and my own small place in this beautifully fleeting moment within the endlessly turbulent and sublime music of creation.”

<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/57050/Canticles-of-the-Holy-Wind--John-Luther-Adams/>

RE-FORMATION

Composer: Sebastian Currier

Premiere: 2017, Minnesota Chorale

Publisher: Ovation Music Publishing (2018)

Text: Sarah Monguso

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: orchestra

Approximate duration: 30'

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: This five movement tour de force for large choir and orchestra bridges 500 years of history, from the corruption that inspired the reformation to the modern day corruption of our planet. The composer states the following in his program notes: "As RE-FORMATION begins, we hear fragments from Mendelssohn's Reformation Symphony ring out amidst a more obscure sound world, like decaying structures in a ruined landscape. Written for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is a work for orchestra and chorus which looks back to the Reformation and forward to future of our planet. As it unfolds, it traces the process by which ideas are formulated, rethought, replaced, and recycled."

<https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Sebastian-Currier-RE-FORMATION/102784>

Spontaneous Earth

Composer: Martin Sedek

Premiere: 2017 Rutgers University (archival recording only)

Publisher: Ovation Music Publishing (2018)

Text: e.e. cummings

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: orchestra (also arranged for two pianos, harp, and percussion)

Approximate duration: 35'

Difficulty: Medium

Comments: This work is divided into five movements and traverses the many characteristics of spring, with Mother Nature as the central figure. Her personified presence in the work vacillates between the sacred and the profane, creating a sensuous backdrop for the entire work. In his preface to the score, Sedek outlines his relationship to the text: “Spontaneous Earth is...a set of five poems of spring, which though almost a hundred years old, are incredibly timely as issues of climate change and our abuse of nature are increasingly in the spotlight of social and political discourse.”

https://issuu.com/martinsedek/docs/watermarked_omp104071_vocal

Mass for the Endangered

Composer: Sarah Kirkland Snider

Premiere: 2018, Choir of Trinity Church Wall Street

Publisher: G. Schirmer (2018)

Text: Latin Mass, Nathaniel Bellows

Voicing: SATB

Instrumentation: string quartet, winds, percussion, harp, piano

Approximate duration: 45'

Difficulty: Advanced

Comments: This six-movement work outlines the structure of the traditional ordinary Mass and also includes an “Alleluia” movement. The text retains part of the original Latin, but is supplemented newly composed texts by Nathaniel Bellows. The Credo movement is based on a ground by Caroline Shaw. The role of the strings, harp, and piano play prominently throughout the work, and the winds dot the texture throughout. In Snider’s notes on her website, *Mass for the Endangered* “embodies a prayer for endangered animals and the imperiled environments in which they live. Written for SATB choir and twelve instruments, the six-movement piece appeals for parity, compassion, and protection, from a mindset—a malignance or apathy—that threatens to destroy the planet we all are meant to share.”

<https://www.sarahkirklandsnider.com/works/mass-for-the-endangered>

Watersheds

Composer: Nicholas Cline

Premiere: 2018, Bienen Ensemble, Northwestern University, Evanston

Publisher: self-published

Text: John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Mary Austin, C.D. Wilbur, Rachel Carlson, the

Supreme Court

Voicing: SATB (12 part divisi)

Instrumentation: saxophone and electronics

Approximate duration: 34'

Difficulty: Advanced

Comments: This eight-movement work opens with a thirteen-minute saxophone solo in the Prelude, titled “water-witching,” referring to the practice of envisioning underground flows of water to replenish a dry well. The other movements of the piece use diverse texts to juxtapose varied and distinctly American attitudes toward water. Six of the seven choral movements are unaccompanied, but movement five brings back the saxophone and electronics. The final movement also employs a playback tape of rain sounds. At various points in the score, Cline asks for just intonation, although the piece can be performed without this tuning as well. On his website, Cline offers thoughts on the title of the work: “As spaces which separate the flow of water, watersheds define the borders of this shared resource.”

<https://www.nicholas-cline.com/works/watersheds/>

Recently Premiered Eco-choral Works

A Passion for the Planet, Geoffrey Hudson (2021)

<https://www.hybridvigormusic.org/our-projects/a-passion-for-the-planet/>

Elegy for the Earth, Adam Silverman (2022)

<https://adambsilverman.com/music-for-voices/>

Earth Ritual, Robert Kyr (2022)

<https://www.conspirare.org/earth-ritual/>

Earth Symphony, Jake Runestad (2022)

<https://jakerunestad.com/earth-symphony/>

Lament for the Earth, Steve Heitzeg (2022)

<https://www.steveheitzeg.com/works/ecoscores/>

Lost Birds, Christopher Tin (2022)

<https://www.christophertin.com/sheetmusic/thelostbirds.html>

Malhaar: Requiem for Water, Reena Esmail (2022)

<https://www.reenaesmail.com/catalog-item/malhaar-requiem-for-water/>

Mosaic for Earth, Dwight Bigler (2022)

<https://www.mosaicforearth.org/>

unEarth, Julia Wolfe (2023)

<https://juliawolfemusic.com/events/unearth-performed-by-the-new-york-philharmonic-world-premiere/>

Vespers of the Blessed Earth, John Luther Adams (2023)

<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/62341/Vespers-of-the-Blessed-Earth--John-Luther-Adams/>

Water: An Environmental Oratorio, Stephanie Martin (2023)

<https://www.stephaniemartinmusic.com/author/admin/>