

## Program Notes for *Winter Heavens*

*Winter Heavens* is a poem by English novelist and poet George Meredith. The text is rich in winter imagery and uses them as metaphors of human awareness of mortality. The music gives dimension to the world of the poem with spare harmonies, expressive lines, and an overall reflective tone.

The piece is in three main sections; the first takes the opening four lines of the poem and begins painting a haunting, winter landscape. This section has spare, two voice counterpoint to suggest barrenness. The second section has a passage for the lower voices, and then brings in the tension of certain death with soft, semi-spoken chanting as an accompanying figure. The final section, which begins with a sung ostinato figure in the male voices emphasizing the fleeting nature of physical life, comes to a high point on the word 'radiance,' then ends with a whisper that suggests death is not the final end.

### *Winter Heavens*

*by George Meredith*

Sharp is the night, but stars with frost alive  
Leap off the rim of earth across the dome.  
It is a night to make the heavens our home  
More than the nest whereto apace we strive.  
Lengths down our road each fir-tree seems a hive,  
Its swarms outrushing from the golden comb.  
They waken waves of thoughts that burst to foam:  
The living throb in me, the dead revive.  
Yon mantle clothes us: there, past mortal breath,  
Life glistens on the river of the death.  
It folds us, flesh and dust; and have we knelt,  
Or never knelt, or eyed as kine\* the springs  
Of radiance, the radiance enrings:  
And this is the soul's haven to have felt.

\**kine*, cattle