

SACRED

SATB and organ

OXFORD

JOHN RUTTER

BE THOU MY VISION



Composer's note

The well-loved hymn text *Be thou my vision* has a provenance steeped in Irish medieval history and legend. In its original Irish version (*Rob tú mo bhoile*) it is reputed to have been written in the 8th century by the blind monk Dallan Forgaill as a tribute to the bravery of St Patrick, who lit Paschal candles on Slane Hill in County Meath on Easter Eve, c.433, in defiance of an edict issued by King Logaire that no fires were to be lit until the start of the pagan spring festival. Impressed by Patrick's devotion, the king spared his life and permitted him to continue his missionary work in Ireland.

The Irish antiquarian scholar Mary Byrne translated the ancient text into English prose, publishing it in 1905 in an academic journal of Irish studies – an example of the widespread vogue for research into folklore around this time – and her prose version was picked up by Eleanor Hull, president of the Irish Literary Society of London, who made the present familiar metrical translation closely based on it. This was published in her *Poem-Book of the Gael* in 1912.

The versified text was paired with the Irish folk melody now known as *Slane* in an Irish hymnal of 1919, and since then has become deservedly popular as a hymn in many countries. It was with some hesitation, therefore, that I decided in 1988 to make a new musical setting of the text; however, my setting is an anthem, not a hymn, and I also do believe that new music can reveal a familiar text in a new light.

The piece was conceived and written for choir with small orchestra. The original version of the vocal score shows the accompaniment in piano reduction, but I have taken advantage of this new edition to recast it for organ, as being more generally useful for performance in church.

Performance hints

The style of the music is clearly influenced by Celtic folk-melody, and an easy, almost conversational approach to the singing is called for. The rhythmic notation of the opening melody is not inaccurate, but it can be interpreted with a little flexibility.

Publisher's note

This anthem is scored for small orchestra as follows: flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, 2 horns in F, harp, strings. Scores and parts are available on sale – score (ISBN 978-0-19-341309-2); set of parts (ISBN 978-0-19-341310-8) – and on hire (ISBN 978-0-19-350454-7), from Oxford University Press or its appointed agent.

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for Dr Paul Thomas and the Oratorio Choir of St Michael and All Angels' Church, Dallas, Texas

Be thou my vision

Original text c.8th century

Tr. Mary Byrne (1880–1931)

Versified Eleanor Hull (1860–1935)

JOHN RUTTER

Slow and calm, with a steady pulse ♩ = c.56

ORGAN *p legato*

5 SOPRANOS and ALTOS *unis. p unhurried*

1. Be thou my_ vi - sion, O Lord of my heart, Be all else but

8 *cresc. mp*

naught to me, save that thou art; Be thou my best thought in the day and the

11 *p*

night, Both wak-ing and sleep-ing, thy pres-ence my light.

A

14 *unis. mp*

S. A. *mp*

2. Be thou my wis- dom, be thou my true word, Be thou ev-er

T. B. *mp*

A

17 *cresc. mf*

S. A. *cresc. mf*

with me, and I with thee, Lord, Be thou my great Fa- ther, and I thy true

T. B. *cresc. mf*

A

20 *mp* **B**

S. A. *mp*

son; Be thou in me dwell- ing, and I with thee one.

T. B. *mp* *(unis.) mf*

3. Be thou my

B

23

T. B.

breast-plate, my sword for the fight; Be thou my whole ar - mour, be thou my true

mf

26

S. A.

unis. mf

Be thou my soul's shel-ter, be thou my strong tow-er: O

T. B.

might; *mf*

f *dim.* *mf*

29

f Pow - er

raise thou me hea-ven-ward, great Pow - er of my pow-er.

f

cresc.

33 **C Poco rubato** *p* $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

4. Rich - es I heed not, nor

C Poco rubato $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

mf dim. *mp dim.* *p*

37 *mp cresc.*

man's emp - ty praise: Be thou mine in - he - ri - tance

mp cresc. *mp cresc.*

p

(Ped.)

40 *mf* *f*

now and al - ways; Be thou and thou on - ly the first in my

mf *f*

mf

Man.

45 *dim.* *mf* *rall.* *mp* *a tempo*

heart: _____ O Sov - 'reign of hea - ven, _____ my

f *dim.* *mf* *rall.* *a tempo*

(Ped.)

49 *dim.* *ten.* **D** *p*

trea - sure_ thou art.

dim. *ten.* *p*

D *p dolce espress.* *cresc.*

52 *unis. mp*

5. High King of _____ hea - ven, _____ thou hea - ven's bright Sun, _____ O grant me its

unis. mp

mp

55 *mf* *f*

joys af-ter vic-t'ry is won; Great Heart of my own heart, what-ev-er be-

58 *mf* *unis.* *mp*

-fall, Still be thou my vi-sion, O Rul-er of all, Still be thou my

61 *rall.* *unis.* *p* *pp*

O Rul-er of all. vi-sion, O Rul-er of all,

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