

COMPOSER NOTES: DA CAPO AL FINE MAGAZINE: ISSUES 01 & 02

About the Composer

Molly Catherine Nixon is the founder of *The Da Capo al Fine Project*, providing free music for choirs and musical performances for senior living communities. Her original compositions are donated to teachers in the *Da Capo al Fine* magazine twice a year, along with resources to help teachers plan student performances at senior living communities. Taking her students to perform in these spaces was a highlight of her teaching career. She hopes to inspire other teachers to cultivate a heart of service in their students by giving them these valuable life experiences.

Molly Catherine majored in Music Education and Spanish at Illinois State University where she received a Bachelors of Music Education and was designated a Presidential Scholar, Bone Scholar, and Presser Scholar. She was also awarded the Barbara Wiltberger Scholarship, Charles Bolden Scholarship and Friends of the Arts Scholarship. In addition to teaching private piano and voice lessons, she taught at Epiphany Catholic School in Normal, IL for 15 years until she stepped down in 2023 to begin *The Da Capo al Fine Project*. She also has an extensive career as a collaborative pianist, playing for soloists, school choirs, churches, and festivals.

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I am thrilled to share my music with so many singers and directors throughout the world! We each have some kind of gift to offer those around us, and I believe one of mine is the gift of composing. I hope my songs inspire, encourage, comfort, challenge, and animate singers and their audiences, wherever they are performed.

I hope learning about the inspiration for each of my songs will enhance your enjoyment and performance of these works.

Molly Catherine Nixon



“Today Is the Day” - 3 part mixed

I often refer to “Today Is the Day” as the anthem of *The Da Capo al Fine Project* because it was the first composition written specifically for this project, and it was born out of the personal process I went through to start *The Da Capo al Fine Project*. I was in the midst of stepping away from my full-time job to focus on this project, in addition to moving to Tennessee to pursue a relationship with the man who would become my husband, when I began to question my decisions. While on a flight to visit my future husband, I began to doubt if all this risk and change I was making was a good idea. A voice in my head responded to the doubt with this: “Today is the day. Now is the time to go for it and give this dream a chance. If not now, when? If you pass up this opportunity, you may not get another chance and will have to live with that regret. Today is the day.” So, I moved forward with my plan to phase out of my current job and begin focusing more time on composing and performing at senior living communities. I wrote almost the entire melody and lyrics to this song while on that flight from Illinois to Tennessee. In a lot of ways I was speaking to myself when I wrote the lyrics to this song, and now I hope those same lyrics will speak to teachers, students, and audience members, reminding them that their “dream is a gift that can change the world.”

“It’s a Winter Wonderland” - 2 part

“It’s a Winter Wonderland” was born out of necessity in December of 2022. I had been working on some challenging Christmas songs with my 4th & 5th grade choir and realized we only had a couple more weeks before their concert and we still needed a third song for the concert. I knew it would need to be a quick learn, but still be musically interesting, challenging and fun. My students had already enjoyed learning about jazz and scat singing in one of our warm-ups and asked if I could write them a jazzy Christmas song. Challenge accepted! A few days later “It’s a Winter Wonderland” was born. When I taught it to my students they loved it and one little girl named Charlotte exclaimed, “This is my new favorite song!” It was not only a hit with the students, but also with our audience.

My students originally performed “It’s a Winter Wonderland” in a unison rendition with only the call and response sections dividing into two parts. To provide a little more of a challenge, I decided to create a two part version to share with teachers in the first issue of the *Da Capo al Fine* magazine. The added harmonies make this song a fun winter challenge for any junior high level choir.

“The Wind Blowed” - TTBB

“The Wind Blowed” was initially inspired by the wide popularity of the song “The Wellerman”. After seeing how much student choirs were enjoying this song I wanted to write something in that same vein to keep the excitement in younger singers going. However, I didn’t want this song to embody the typical “rum and women” theme that many shanties seemed to focus on. Since I was writing this song for an autumn release I decided it would be about something spooky and mysterious, making it a perfect selection for fall concerts. The first verse and chorus came to me quickly but I was stuck for a month or so on how to continue the song. After brainstorming with my husband I was able to write the second verse, which quickly turned into the bridge with its wind like effects, and the culminating third verse. In this song the “wind” is characterized as both a threatening and comforting thing for the sailor. On land it is ominous and tricks the mind into hearing and imagining things, while on the sea it is the power which takes him on his adventures. This shift in the wind’s character is noted in the shift of the chorus at the end.

**Special Note: While “blowed” is not the common or grammatically most appropriate past tense form of the word “blow”, I actively chose to use the colloquial past tense to add to the wind like characteristics of the chorus. By repeating the “O” vowel sound, a rushing air effect is accomplished.*

“We Light a Candle” - 2 part

As I was finishing up the first issue of the *Da Capo al Fine* magazine, I wanted to right one more song that would be appropriate for winter concerts. Candles are a common symbol during winter time, whether to bring light during the darker days of winter or to represent elements of the Advent preparation season in the Christian religion. “Tonight We Light a Candle” was intentionally written with language that would make it perfect for an Advent celebration but also appropriate for a secular setting as well. It touches on the theme of light overcoming darkness with peace, hope, joy, and love. From a musical standpoint I wanted to give each voice a chance to shine so I alternated which voice part lead each verse. As a life long alto, I know sometimes the altos want the melody too. ;) As the song progresses into the third verse about joy, the piano part becomes more energized and active to reflect the joy represented in the third candle.

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“The Kiwi Bird Song” - 3 part mixed

The inspiration for “The Kiwi Bird Song” developed during a road trip from Illinois to Tennessee (a trip I took many times while dating my husband who lived in Tennessee.) Initially the opening percussive melody came to mind, so as I often do, I pulled up the voice recorder app on my phone and recorded the short phrase. A month later I revisited this tune and decided the song should be about a bird, since the sound seemed much like a bird call. After a Google search on bird calls I realized the Kiwi bird from New Zealand would be the perfect subject matter for this song! It’s call was similar to the sound I had created and it’s name would easily fit into the tune (originally sung as “ki-ri ki ki ki ki ki). Through research, I learned a lot about this strange little bird and incorporated those facts into the lyrics of the song, including the 5 species of Kiwi birds: brown, great spotted and little spotted, Tokaeka, and Rowi.

Singers will enjoy the fun percussive sounds created with the voice and body in “The Kiwi Bird Song” and young male voices will relish having the spotlight for a while.

To learn more about the Kiwi bird, click the link below.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kiwi/facts/>

“Don’t Get Tired” - unison

“Don’t Get Tired” was inspired by a verse in Galatians 6 that says *“Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* The lyrics encourage singers and audience members to persevere in difficult situations, continuing to do what is right and good, even if it’s difficult or seems to not make a difference. This message is a powerful message for student singers who can experience a variety of challenges and at times be tempted to give up or give into peer pressure, turning away from doing what they know is right and good.

The jazzy style of this piece, its simple form, and basic call and response scat section, makes it a great introduction to jazz and scatting. Its verses and scat sections can be repeated as desired for the number of scat leaders or soloists you wish to highlight. While not necessary, this piece would be enhanced by a jazz combo if possible.

“Small Things, Great Love” - 3 part treble (optional round)

The lyrics for this piece were inspired by a famous quote attributed to Mother Theresa. She said, “We cannot do great things, only small things with great love.” Mother Theresa was a Catholic nun who received the Nobel Peace Prize for her selfless work she did in India. She truly believed the sentiment of this statement and lived it out as she spent her life serving the poor and sick on the streets of Calcutta. After seeing that quote written at the end of a friend’s email signature I was inspired to put the text to music and create a song that could inspire singers and audience members to live lives of great love that ultimately change the world around them, one small thing at a time.

“Morning Flight” - SATB w/ divisi

“Morning Flight” was inspired by a recent trip I took with my family to experience the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, held annually in Albuquerque, NM. For an entire week hot air balloon pilots from all over the world gather to paint the sky with their colorful or uniquely shaped balloons. Launches happen early in the morning when the skies are most calm. While writing “Morning Flight”, I wanted to use sound and words to paint the picture of a morning launch. Opening sustained notes create a sense of darkness and stillness, while the piano twinkles like early morning stars. As the song progresses you can hear and feel the excitement that goes into preparing for a launch—pilots and crews rushing around to lay out balloons and begin filling them with air. Once inflated, balloons slowly rise from the ground, illustrated by the slower tempo and ascending lines. Layers of floating vocal lines paint the picture of a multitude of balloons gently rising and falling, suspended in the air. As the flight comes to an end, descending voices carry the balloons back to the earth. I hope singers and audience members enjoy their first hot air balloon ride through the performance of “Morning Flight”.

To learn more about the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta click the link below.

<https://balloonfiesta.com/>