

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: March 9, 2018, Broadway Presbyterian Church, NYC. Commissioned by New Amsterdam Singers in honor of its founder and Music Director Clara Longstreth, on the occasion of the chorus's 50th anniversary.

Duration: 12'

Instrumentation: Mixed chorus & Brass trio (horn, trumpet, trombone)

Walks of Life was inspired by the truly unique circumstances of its commissioning: the New Amsterdam Singers wanted a new piece to honor its founder, Clara Longstreth, on the occasion of the chorus's 50th anniversary. That an avocational choral organization can celebrate its 50th anniversary with its own founder at the helm is truly impressive, and called to my own mind the many generations of singers from all walks of life who have come through her chorus over these 50 years. An urban bunch, Clara's singers come together weekly in the midst of their busy city lives. Taking the phrase "walks of life" at face value, I found three writers to help illuminate. Each has a different take on what breathes life into city walking: Corbusier believes that walking among the city "shapes which are coordinated" brings "serenity and joy"; Gertrude Stein's narrator and her companion meander and negotiate as lovers do in their own familiar surroundings; and Robert Walser's narrator feels the caffeinated rush of the crowds walking in city streets.

The first couple of minutes of the piece include a walking semi-chorus, in duets and small groups, meandering around the performance space before joining the main chorus at the front of the hall. These three types of ambulatory joy provide three distinct moods for the piece. Brass seemed fitting for the occasion: originally outdoor instruments, they can bring nobility, ceremony and clangor, in turn.

— Lisa Bielawa

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Text

From *The City of To-morrow and its Planning* by Le Corbusier, tr. Frederick Etchells

Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes right to it.

In old cities famous for their beauty we walk among shapes which are co-ordinated, designed around a centre or along an axis.

Horizontals, magnificent prisms, pyramids, spheres and cylinders...Here we have serenity and joy.

We challenge, we quarrel, we go to war. Or else we agree...

From *Geography and Plays* by Gertrude Stein

Where shall we walk tomorrow.
Tonight you mean.
Not not this evening.
Yes I understand.
Where shall we walk tomorrow.
To Fernville.
No not to Fernville.
To Arbuthnot.
No not to Arbuthnot.
In the park.
No not the park.
Well then let's walk along by the water.
No let's not go that way.
Then let us walk to Wintersdale.
Yes let's walk to Wintersdale.
Very well then.

From *Jakob von Gunten* by Robert Walser, tr. Christopher Middleton

Often I go out onto the street, and there I seem to be living in an altogether wild fairy tale...what rattlings and patterings! What shoutings, whizzings, and hummings! And everything so tightly penned in. Right up close to the wheels of cars people are walking, children, girls, men, and elegant women... there's a going and a coming, an appearing and a vanishing...people are going who knows where, and here they come again and they are quite different people and who knows where they are coming from...And the sun sparkles down on it all.

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