

# Gwyneth Walker

# Purer than Purest Pure

a Christmas Anthem

for SATB Chorus divisi

### Purer than Purest Pure

duration: 3 minutes 15 seconds

premiered by the Harvard University Choir Edward Elwyn Jones, Choirmaster Memorial Church at Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts December 10, 2023

#### Purer than Purest Pure

purer than purest pure whisper of a whisper

so(big with innocence) forgivingly a once of eager glory,no more miracle may grow

-childfully serious flower of holiness

a pilgrim from beyond the future's future;and immediate like some newly remembered dream—

flaming a coolly bell touches most mere until

(eternally)with(now) luminous the shadow of love himself:who's we -nor can you die or i

and every world,before silence begins a star

- E. E. Cummings

### O Jesu Sweet

O Jesu sweet, O Jesu mild, born in love's image, undefiled, light in our hearts your holy flame, that we may know wonders in your name.

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu... a star, a star, a star... a pilgrim from afar.

from the hymn text "O Jesulein Sass" by Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654) adapted by Gwyneth Walker

#### Notes

This poem by E. E. Cummings creates several images which specifically inspire the musical setting. The opening phrases speak of *purity–a pure* child, a child of innocence. Thus, the music starts on "middle *C*," in the *pure* key of *C* Major. The sparseness of pitches from the voices offer *purity* of sound.

The choir then *bounces* on the words *childfully serious* (perhaps a contradiction unto itself!).

A favorite image of the composer is a *pilgrim from beyond the future*'s *future*. Here, the child (the Christ Child) is seen as coming to earth from afar – from the Father in Heaven, or, in 21st-century reference, as a space traveler.

Thus, as the poem closes with the words and *every world*, *before silence begins a star*, we are reminded of the Heavenly distance from which the child/pilgrim is traveling.

This reverence of the child extends into a version (lyrics adapted by composer) of the familiar hymn, "O Jesu Sweet." The connection to the Cummings' poem comes in the common imagery of a holy flame, and in the closing lines a star, a star... a pilgrim from afar.

## The Composer

Widely performed throughout the country, the music of American composer Gwyneth Walker is beloved by performers and audiences alike for its energy, beauty, reverence, drama, and humor. Dr. Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) is a graduate of Brown University and the Hartt School of Music. She holds B.A., M.M. and D.M.A. degrees in Music Composition. A former faculty member of the Oberlin College Conservatory, she resigned from academic employment in 1982 in order to pursue a career as a full-time composer. For nearly 30 years, she lived on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont before returning to live in her childhood hometown of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Further information concerning Gwyneth Walker and her works is available at: <a href="https://www.gwynethwalker.com">www.gwynethwalker.com</a>

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for the Memorial Church at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, the 114th Annual Christmas Carol Services, and the Harvard University Choir, Edward Elwyn Jones, Gund University Organist and Choirmaster

### Purer than Purest Pure

#### a Christmas Anthem

for SATB Chorus divisi unaccompanied

E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)

"O Jesu Sweet"

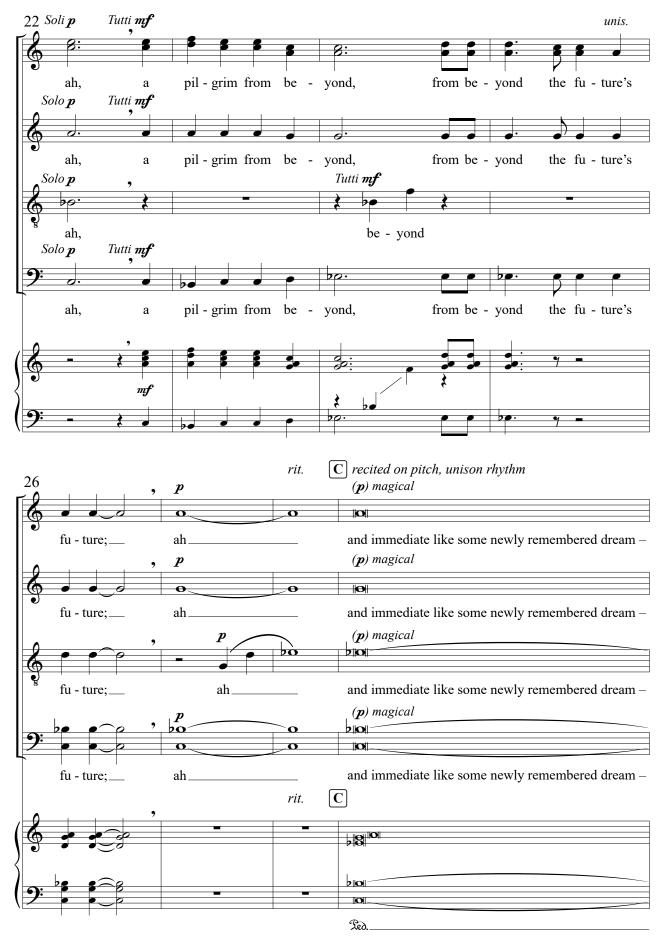
Gwyneth Walker



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\*Chorus may rest in m. 41 if keyboard plays.

Walker | Purer than Purest Pure











New Canaan, Connecticut

