

A PRAIRIE TRIBUTE

No. 1

The Vanishing Point

For SA Choir, Clarinet and Piano

John Burge

About this Work:

A Prairie Tribute was commissioned by the Cantaré Children's Choir of Calgary, Alberta, Catherine Glaser-Climie, Artistic Director, to mark the choir's 10th anniversary in 2008. Having grown up in Calgary, Canadian composer John Burge was keen to accept this commission. Coincidentally, 2008 also marked the 10th anniversary of the passing of novelist W.O. Mitchell, a longtime resident of Calgary. The idea took shape to pay tribute to both the author and the prairies by using the titles of three of Mitchell's novels in which the prairie landscape features prominently as springboards for the composition.

Scored for SA choir, clarinet and piano, the work is in three contrasting movements. The first movement, *The Vanishing Point*, is a wordless soundscape that captures the vastness and sense of mystery that one feels standing on the prairie terrain. The choir divides into multiple parts to create clouds of chordal sonorities that repeatedly fade into silence while the opening clarinet melody returns in different guises as a kind of unifying thematic gesture. The text for the second movement, *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, was compiled by John Burge from comments provided by the choir members themselves about things that they like to do on the prairies in the summer. In this movement, the music reflects the carefree quality of the words with an emphasis on syncopated rhythms and an energetically independent clarinet part. The final movement, *Who has Seen the Wind*, is a setting of a poem of the same title by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894). The slow, hymn-like quality of this movement reflects the sacred implications of the text. The choir actually sings the same music for both verses but the differing dynamics and instrumental accompaniment obscures the obviousness of the repetition somewhat. The movement ends by returning to the overlapping chordal texture heard in the choir at the beginning of the work.

About the Composer:

John Burge was born in Dryden, Ontario in 1961. He also holds degrees in Composition and Theory from the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. Since 1987 he has been teaching at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario where he currently holds the position of Full Professor and is Director of the School of Music. A passionate advocate of Canadian music, he was a member of the executive council of the Canadian League of Composers for fourteen years, serving as President from 1998-2006.

John Burge has written a large body of vocal, chamber, and orchestral compositions. He is particularly well known though, for his choral music, which has been performed by such choirs as The Elmer Iseler Singers, The BBC Singers, The Amabile Youth Choir, The Toronto Children's Chorus and The St. Louis Symphony Children's Choir. Many of these choral works have been published by the American firm, Boosey and Hawkes. His composition, *Angels' Voices*, for choir and orchestra, received the 2006 Outstanding New Choral Composition Award from the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors and was performed in New York City's Carnegie Hall in 2005.

The Vanishing Point

Movement 1 of "A Prairie Tribute"

Slowly and with much freedom ♩ = 50

Music and text: John Burge (b. 1961)
div. a 3 *p* distant (no vib.)

Soprano

Alto

Clarinet in B \flat

p *mf* *p*

molto espr. *accel.* *rall.* *a tempo*

Slowly and with much freedom ♩ = 50

[Please play the clarinet part with the R.H. if a clarinet is not available.]

Piano

mp *mf* *p*

[Top note of rolled chord is placed on the beat.]

6

n. *p*

n. *p*

p (sub.) *f* *p*

simile: accel. *rall.* *a tempo*

11 *n.*

mf *fp* *f*

[*G is played again after R.H.]

mf *f*

[Bottom note of L.H. rhythmically matches R.H.]

16 *p* (no cresc.) *mf* > *p* *mf* > *p*

ah ah ah

p (no cresc.) *mf* > *p* *mf* > *p*

ah ah ah

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

p

21

n.

mf

f

26

p (no cresc.)

ah

p (no cresc.)

ah

ff

30

mf > p *mf > p* *mf > p*

ah ah ah

mf > p *mf > p* *mf > p*

ah ah ah

p *mf* *p*

34

p cresc. *p cresc.*

ah ah

mf *n.*

pesante mp *f* *p (sub.)*

(non-arp.)

sub

39

f *ff* *mf* *ff*

ah ah

f *ff* *mf* *ff*

ah ah

f

3 3 3 3

(non-arp.)

(8vb)

43

mf *ff* *mf* *ff* *mf*

ah ah

mf *ff* *mf* *ff* *mf*

ah ah

ff (no dim.) *f*

mf *ff* *mf* *ff* *mf* *f* *mf*

48

[*accel.* *mp* *rall.* *f* *a tempo*]

one solo voice

ah

54

tutti (div. a 2)

ah

ah

mf *p*

p *p (sub.)* *mp* *(non-arp.)*

59

pp

ah
pp
ah

p *mf* *p* *mp* *pp*

mf *p* *p* *mp*

Alternate ending for an upright piano

65

n. *n.* *n.* *n.*

(depress notes silently) (depress notes silently)

(Strum strings inside the piano with flesh of finger)

(no pedal) *mf* *f* *mp* (no pedal) *f* *ff* *mf*

8vb - - - - -