

My Last Summer

the poem Canoe
by Keith Douglas, 1920–1944

set for choir TBB

by

F L Dunkin Wedd

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Canoe (1940)

Well, I am thinking this may be my last
summer, but cannot lose even a part
of pleasure in the old-fashioned art
of idleness. I cannot stand aghast

at whatever doom hovers in the background:
while grass and buildings and the somnolent river,
who know they are allowed to last forever,
exchange between them the whole subdued sound

of this hot time. What sudden fearful fate
can deter my shade wandering next year
from a return? Whistle and I will hear
and come again another evening, when this boat

travels with you alone toward Iffley:
as you lie looking up for thunder again,
this cool touch does not betoken rain;
it is my spirit that kisses your mouth lightly.

Keith Castellain Douglas

born Tunbridge Wells 1920, died Normandy 9 June 1944

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My Last Summer

Poem: *Canoe* by Keith Douglas (1940)

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In a bittersweet manner

$\text{♩} = 70$

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a vocal line in the bass clef and piano accompaniment in both treble and bass clefs. The time signature is 3/2. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#). The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a *Solo - recit* instruction. The lyrics are: "Well, I am thin-king this may be my last". The piano accompaniment consists of a simple harmonic accompaniment with a rising fourth interval in the bass line.

Keith Douglas's poem 'Canoe' is notable for its duality of mood. It contrasts the languorous progress of of Keith and Antoinette's canoe through Oxford, and the coming world war - in which Douglas was himself to die.

Reflecting this, my piece was conceived with two main motifs. The first is a folk tune, worthy of Vaughan Williams, composed not found: this stands for the Oxfordshire countryside, with its rich tradition of folk song and dance, a tune which opens with a rising fourth.

The second is a series of stacked chords made of that same fourth interval, C to F, F to B, B to E, and so forth, an unstable harmony that reflects the stormclouds of war.

The restless switching between F natural and F sharp accentuates this instability. In the poem's carefree sections, as befits a folk tune, the music is chorale-like, only beginning to break up when war's horror is superposed.

The piano provides a simple accompaniment, as well as filling in melody when the voices fall silent.

sum· mer

Tempo giusto

mf

This system contains the first five measures of the piece. It features a vocal line with the lyrics "sum· mer" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf* and a tempo instruction of *Tempo giusto*. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand.

This system contains the next five measures of the piece. It continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment from the first system. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the left hand and chords in the right hand.

f
Well I am thin · king

f Tutti
Well I am thin · king

f
Well I am thin · king

f

3

3

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20

this may be my last sum · mer

this may be my last sum · mer

this may be my last sum · mer

3

3

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I am thin·king this may be my last

I am thin·king this may be my last

I am thin·king this may be my last

mp 30 *mf* *mf* *mf*

sum·mer But can·not lose e·ven a

sum·mer But can·not lose e·ven a

sum·mer But can·not lose e·ven a

mp *p* *mf*

part of plea - sure in the old - fa - shioned art of i - dle -

part of plea - sure in the old - fa - shioned art of i - dle -

part of plea - sure in the old - fa - shioned art of i - dle -

ness I can not stand a - ghist a -

ness I can not stand a - ghist a -

ness I can not stand a - ghist a -

mp p 40 mp p mp p

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ghast a - ghist at what - e - ver doom ho - vers

ghast a - ghist at what - e - ver doom ho - vers

ghast a - ghist at what - e - ver doom ho - vers

ho - vers in the back - ground while grass and buil -

in the back - ground while grass and buil -

in the back - ground while grass and buil -

50

dings and the som - no - lent ri -

dings and the som - no - lent ri -

dings and the som - no - lent ri -

ver who know they are al - lowed

ver who know they are al - lowed

ver who know they are al - lowed

mp 3 60 *p* 3

to last for e - ver grass and buil - dings and

to last for e - ver grass and buil - dings and

to last for e - ver grass and buil - dings and

f ff

ri - ver ex - change be - tween them the whole sub - dued sound of

ri - ver ex - change be - tween them the whole sub - dued sound of

ri - ver ex - change be - tween them the whole sub - dued sound of

f

this hot time. What sud - den fear - ful

this hot time.

f

this hot time. What sud - den fear - ful

70

fate can de - ter my shade

f $\overbrace{\quad\quad\quad}^3$ $\overbrace{\quad\quad\quad}^3$

What fear - ful fate wan - de - ring

fate can de - ter my shade

from a re - turn? re - turn

next year from a re - turn? re - turn

from a re - turn? re - turn

The score for the first system consists of three vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal staves are in treble, bass, and bass clefs. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff. The lyrics are: "from a re - turn? re - turn", "next year from a re - turn? re - turn", and "from a re - turn? re - turn". There are triplets indicated by a '3' over a bracket in the vocal lines.

ff re - turn *80 Simply*

ff re - turn *mf*

ff re turn Whis - tle and I will hear and come a -

Simply

The score for the second system consists of three vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal staves are in treble, bass, and bass clefs. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff. The lyrics are: "re - turn", "re - turn", and "re turn Whis - tle and I will hear and come a -". The first vocal line has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo marking of *80 Simply*. The second vocal line has a dynamic marking of *ff* and *mf*. The piano accompaniment has a dynamic marking of *ff* and *Simply*.

when this boat tra-vels with
 gain a - no - ther eve - ning
 to ward lff - ley
 you a - lone to - ward lff - ley as
 as

mf
mf
ff

3
 3

90

as you lie loo-king up
 you lie loo-king up for thun-der a-gain This
 you lie loo-king up for thun-der a-gain
 be-to-ken rain
 cool touch does not be-to-ken rain be-to-ken
 be-to-ken

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As you lie loo-king up for thun-der a - gain

rain as you lie loo-king

rain

up

this cool touch does not be - to - ken rain

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Calando

it is my spi - rit

this cool touch does not be - to - ken rain

my

Calando

110 *Calando* *Calando*

my spi - rit it is my

spi - rit my spi - rit

Calando *Calando*

circa ♩ = 60 *circa* ♩ = 50 *circa* ♩ = 40

mp *f*

it is my spi - rit it

mp *f*

spi - rit it

it is my spi - rit it

mp *f*

is my spi - rit *Hold a silence here*

Solo - recit *p*

is my spi - rit that tou - ches your face light - ly.

is my spi - rit