# Choral Catalogue 2019

Anselm McDonnell

## Biography

Anselm McDonnell is an Irish/Welsh composer based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He writes in many different mediums, but the voice - and particularly choral works - is a major part of his output, which currently contains over fifty works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, soloists, choirs, electronics, theatre works and audiovisual material.

McDonnell has written for school choirs, amateur groups, university choirs and professional level ensembles. Several of his compositions have received awards: first prize in the Feis Ceoil Choral Composition Competition 2017 and a selection of pieces was awarded first prize in the Third International Kastalsky Choral Writing Competition. Several choral works have been commissioned, including *Asphyxiate,* commissioned by Choir & Organ for their New Music Series in the Jan/Feb 2019 issue. His pieces have been performed around the world, in Finland, Canada, Russia, Japan, North America and across Europe and the UK. McDonnell has worked with the Chamber Choir Ireland, BBC Singers, C4 Ensemble (New York), St. Salvator's Chapel Choir, Cappella Caeciliana, Cantiunculae, Grosvenor Chorale (where he sings Tenor) and the CMG Vocal Group. *Hinneni*, written under the supervision of Sir James MacMillan as part of the Theoartistry project in St. Andrews University, is available on the *Annunciations* CD from Presto Classical.

To purchase CDs, or to request scores, see http://www.anselmguitar.co.uk/ and get in touch. *Asphyxiate* and *The Blue Bird* are published by Cailíno Music. Recordings of these pieces can be heard on Soundcloud, and *Hinneni* can be listened to on Spotify.

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Difficulty from 1-5, 1 being easiest.

★
★ ★
★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

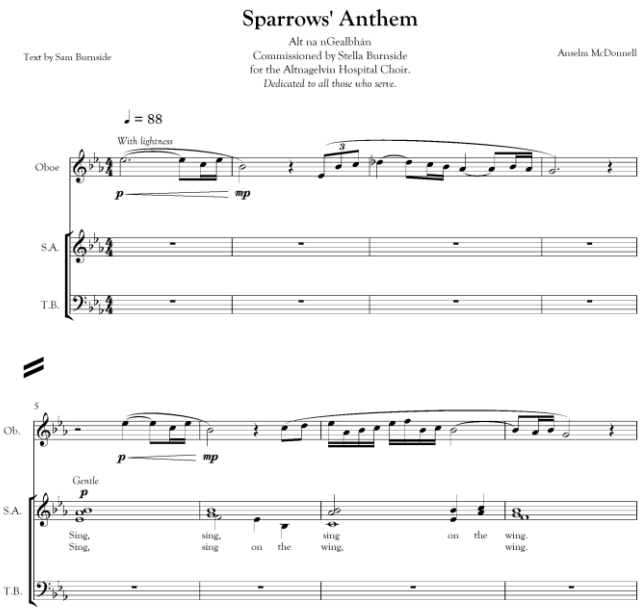
## Secular Works

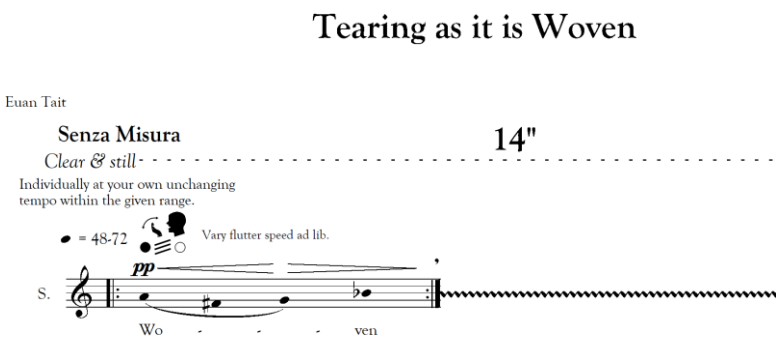
*Sparrows' Anthem*

Year: 2019
Voices: SATB with some divisi, and melody instrument (oboe in 1st performance)
Duration: 5"
Text: English, Irish contemporary poet Sam Burnside
Difficulty: ★★

Performance History:
Commissioned by the Altnagelvin Hospital Choir for their 25th anniversary concert, December 14th Guildhall, Derry/Londonderry.

About: A short setting of a poem written in honour of all those who serve in a capacity of care, particularly staff and volunteers at Altnagelvin Hospital.




*Tearing as it is Woven*

Year: 2019
Voices: SATB
Duration: 6"
Text: English, Scottish contemporary poet Euan Tait
Difficulty: ★★★★★

Performance History:
Written for the Chamber Choir Ireland, premiere in Autumn 2019.

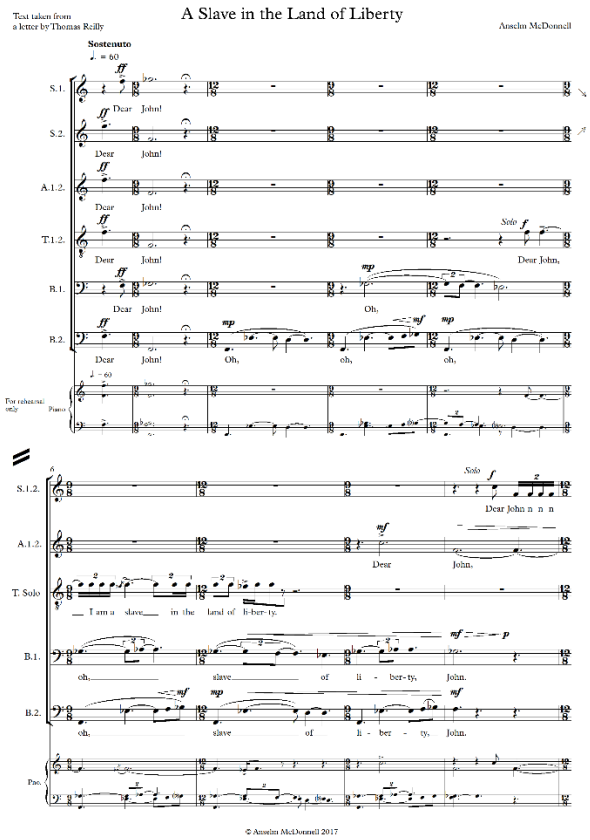
About: A piece exploring contemporary choral writing based on Gaelic Psalm-Singing, this work incorporates complex aleatoric textures to create a seamless web of vocal writing.

*A Slave in the Land of Liberty*

Year: 2017
Voices: SSAATTBB + Soloists
Duration: 6”
Text: English, a letter by Irish journalist Thomas Reilly
Difficulty: ★★★★★

Performance History:
Workshopped by the BBC Singers at Maida Vale Studios, London, 18/09/18
Premiered by the C4 Ensemble in Manhattan, New York 01/12/18.

About: A reflection on the experience of an Irish emigrant, Reilly writes to his dear friend John and speaks of the difficulty of his refugee experience in the 1840s when he is deported to America for involvement in the Young Irelander Rebellion.

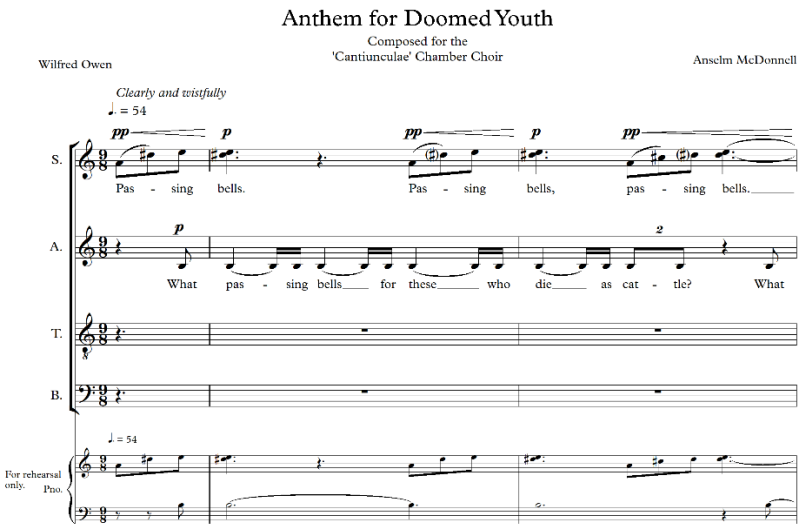


*Anthem for Doomed Youth*

Year: 2015
Voices: SATB with Soprano Divisi
Duration: 5”
Text: English, Wilfred Owen
Difficulty: ★★★

Performance History: A private commission for the Cantiunculae Chamber Choir, this piece was premiered at the PRONI building in Belfast on 01/11/18 as the centrepiece for a concert commemorating the end of World War I.

About: Over the top of a dirge-like, but reflective, march, the piece evokes several sounds from Owen’s poem: the rattling guns, bells for the dead and the screaming shells of artillery



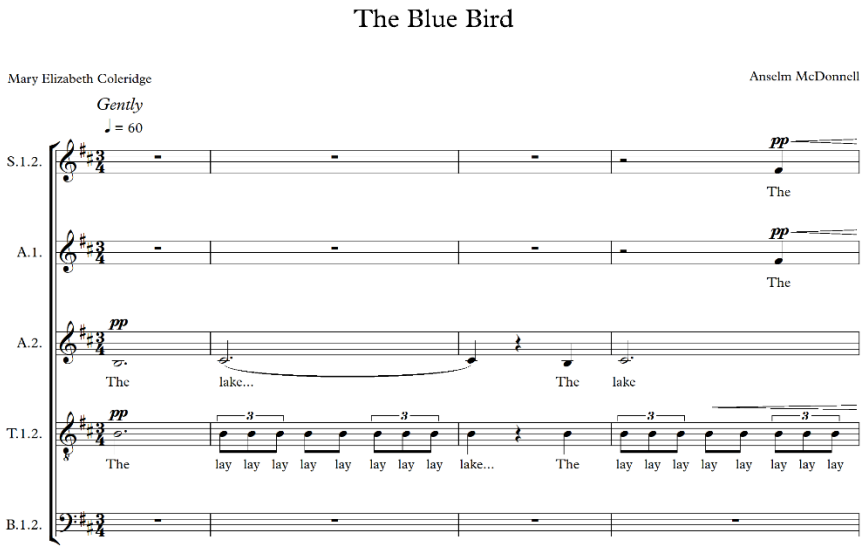

*The Blue Bird*

Year: 2018
Voices: This piece exists in two versions, one for a chamber group of AATTBrB, and the other in SAATTBB
Duration: 3:30”
Text: English, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge
Difficulty: ★★

Performance History: Currently unperformed.

Published by Cailino Music Publishing.

About: A short setting of Coleridge’s iconic text, the material uses the repetition of syllables to create the stasis of the idyllic scene in the poem. The dual image of the bird and its reflection are paralleled in the music by canonic entries that present a motif and its ‘echo image’ in close proximity.



## Works on Biblical/Spiritual Themes

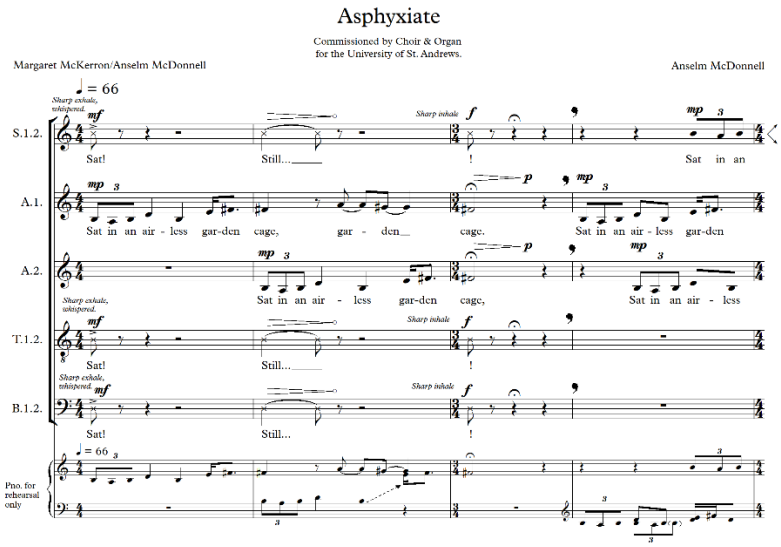
*Aspyhxiate*

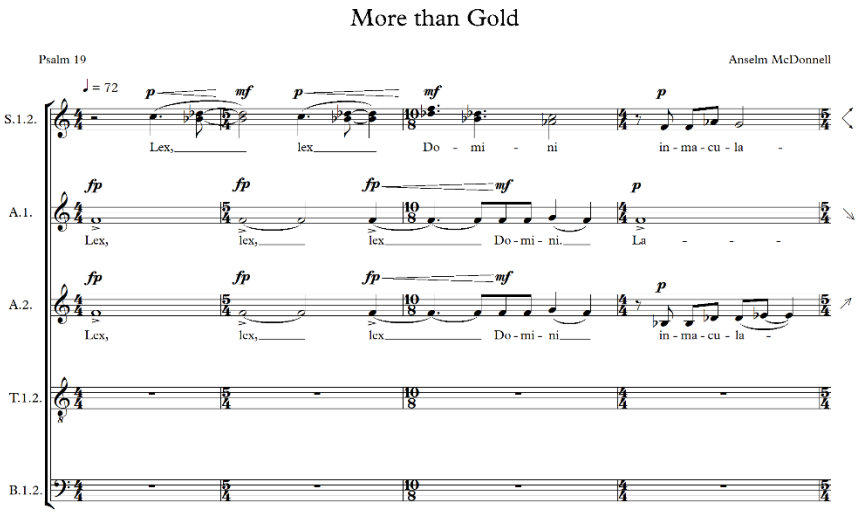
Year: 2018
Voices: SSAATTBB
Duration: 4:30”
Text: English, written by the composer in collaboration with theologian Margaret McKerron.
Difficulty: ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance History: A commission from Choir & Organ for their Jan/Feb 2019 edition. Premiere by St. Salvator’s Chapel Choir, April 21st 2019.

Published by Cailino Music Publishing.

About: Written from Mary Magdalene’s perspective on the resurrection, this work explores Mary’s grief and then shocked relief at the Resurrection of Jesus, using the analogy of breathlessness to convey the tension of the scene.




*More Than Gold*

Year: 2018
Voices: SATB with divisi
Duration: 3:50”
Text: Latin, Vulgate Translation Psalm 19
Difficulty: ★ ★ ★

Performance History: Written for the Cappella Caeciliana Choir, premiered March 30th 2019. This work has been chosen as repertoire for the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music May 2019.

About: A short setting of Psalm 19, where the Psalmist ponders the preciousness of God’s Word in comparison to what has monetary and aesthetic value (gold) and what brings sweetness and sustenance (honey).

Awards: First Place in the 3rd International Kastalsky Choral Composition Competition 2018.

*Hinneni*

Year: 2016
Voices: SSAATTBB
Duration: 3:40”
Text: Hebrew and English, written by the composer in collaboration with theologian Margaret McKerron.
Difficulty: ★★★★

Performance History: Written for the Theoartistry project, *Hinneni* was recorded for release on the CD *Annunciations* by the St. Salvator’s Chapel Choir. It has been performed in numerous services in St. Andrews, including the Easter Service, and was also toured by the choir to venues in Paris, London and Edinburgh.

About: The piece explores the concept of grace in the Garden of Eden as God asks Adam and Eve questions designed to bring them to repent of what they have done. As the piece progresses, the two rebels are brought to the foot of the cross and see God’s plan to pay for their sin in the person of his Son.

Awards: First Place in the 3rd International Kastalsky Choral Composition Competition 2018.

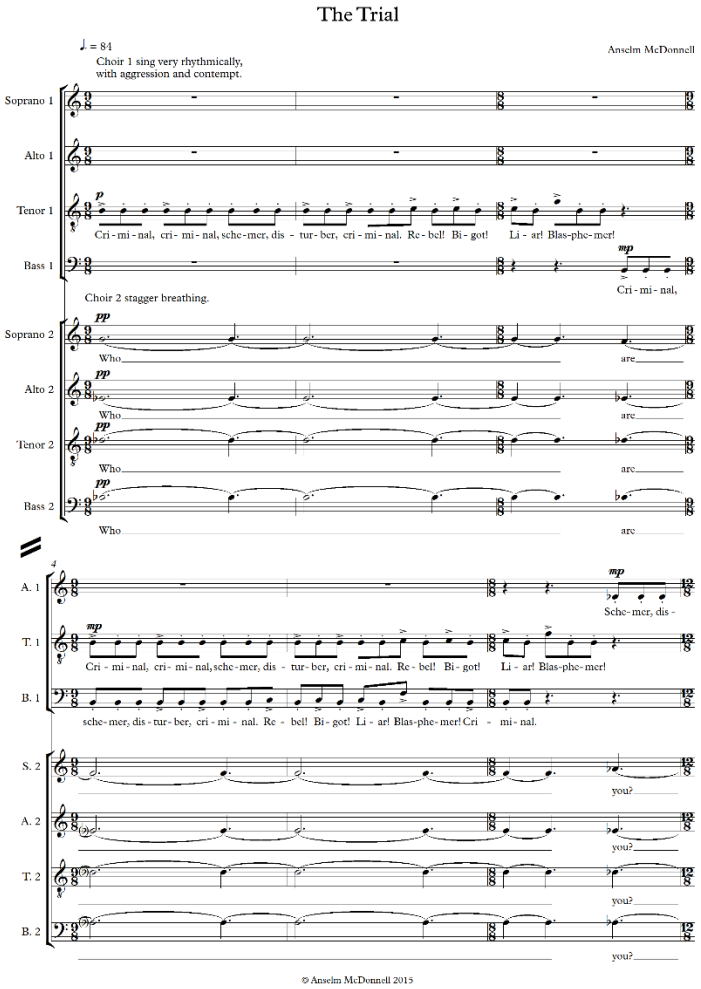
*The Trial*

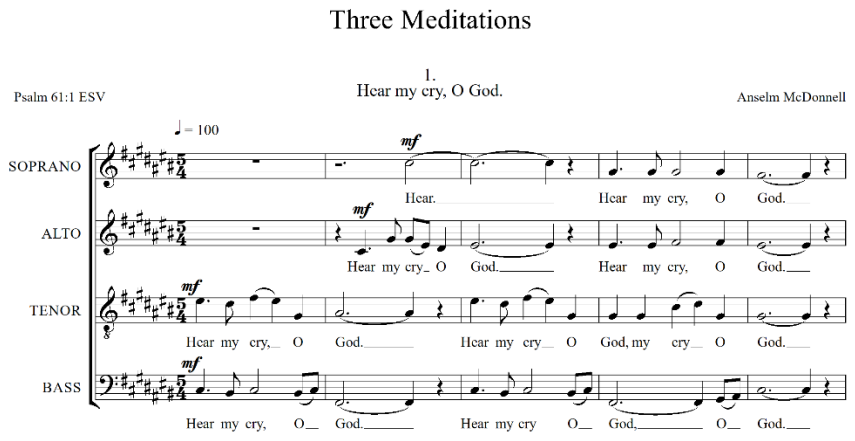
Year: 2015
Voices: Double SATB Choir and actor
Duration: 6:40”
Text: English, compiled by the composer from various Gospel accounts.
Difficulty: ★★★★★

Performance History: Performed by the CMG Vocal Group in Cardiff University at their annual showcase concert.

About: *The Trial* is a theatre piece that depicts the two choirs as the Pharisees, Roman and Jewish crowds who put Jesus Christ on trial and demanded his death. Throughout, Christ stands silent and calm in the face of their hatred, until his great declaration that they shall see him coming in victory at the end of time. The piece then ends with the frantic violence of the crowd shouting for his crucifixion.

Awards: First Place in the Feis Ceoil Choral Composition Competition 2017. First Place in the 3rd International Kastalsky Choral Composition Competition 2018.




*Three Meditations*

Year: 2014
Voices: SATB with occasional divisi
Duration: 5:50”
Text: English, Translation of various Psalms
Difficulty: ★★

Performance History: The second setting was performed by the Cardiff University Chamber Choir, the full work was premiered by Grosvenor Chorale in Killyleagh, June 2018.

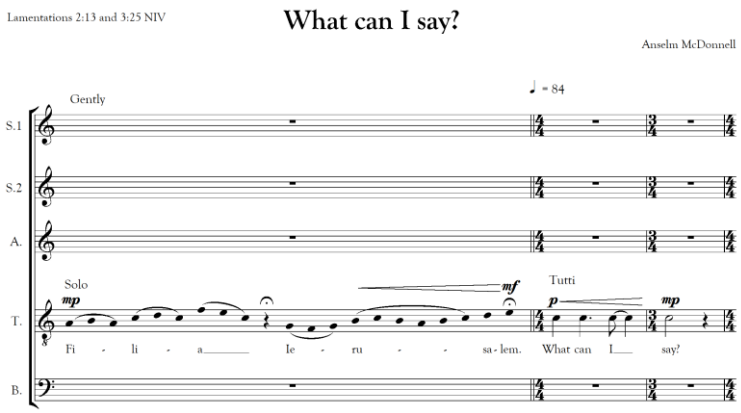
About: Three settings of verses from the Psalms that chart a situation in David’s life from desperation for God to hear him, to his peace as he trusts in the Lord’s provision.

*What Can I Say?*

Year: 2014
Voices: SSSSAATTBB
Duration: 4:30”
Text: English, from the Lamentations of Jeremiah
Difficulty: ★ ★ ★

Performance History: currently unperformed.

About: A setting of text from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, in which the prophet mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem and urges the people to return to God.



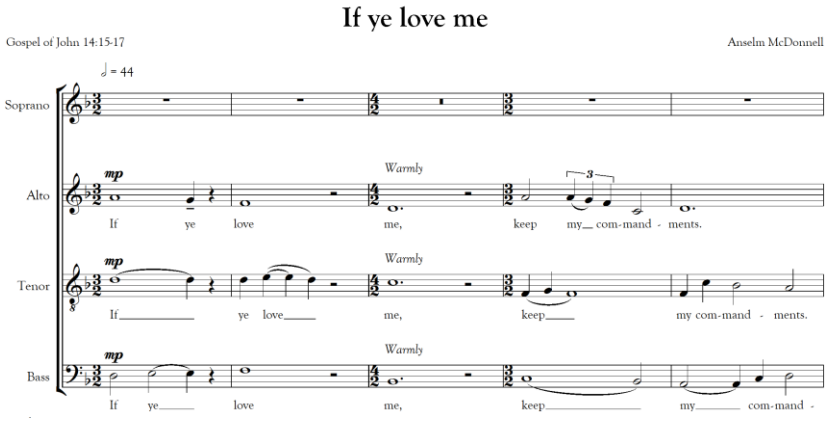
## Works for Amateur Choirs

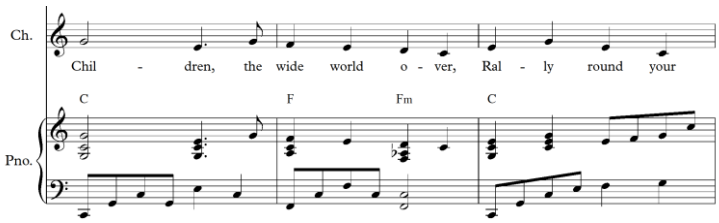
*If ye love me*

Year: 2019
Voices: SSATB
Duration: 3:10”
Text: English, Gospel of John
Difficulty: ★ ★

Performance History: currently unperformed.

About: A staccato melody and silence is used to enhance an underpinning chordal sequence that sets the familiar words of Christ to his disciples.




*Children, the wide world over*

Year: 2019
Voices: Children’s choir, 2 parts
Duration: 3:00”
Text: English, Flora Kirkland
Difficulty: ★

Performance History: premiere in December 2019 by Elmgrove Primary School Choir.

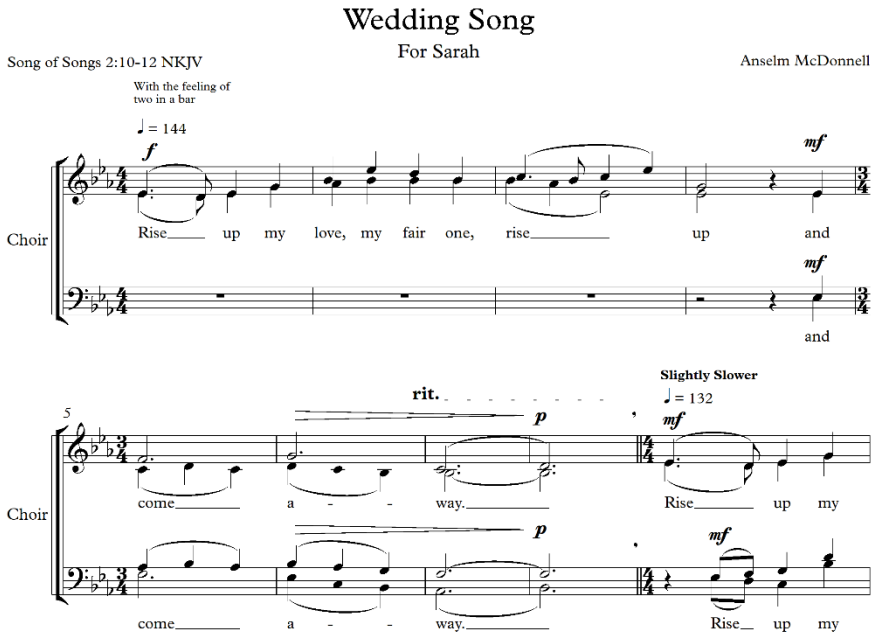
About: A carol for children’s choir, written for Elmgrove Primary School Choir. For piano and 2 part choir, a version with children’s orchestra is also available.

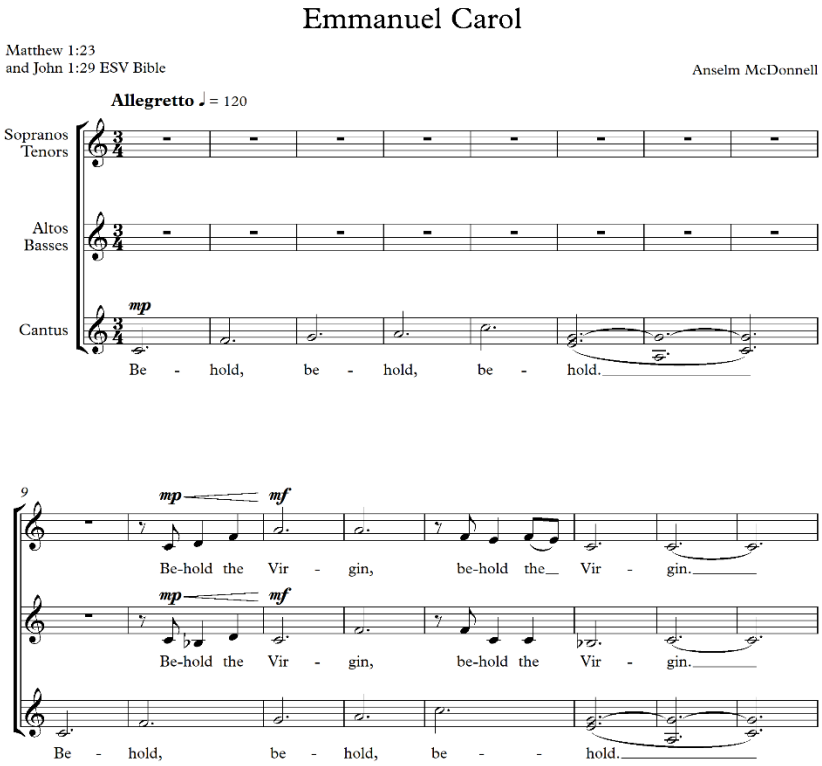
*Wedding Song/Introit*

Year: 2018
Voices: SATB with occasional divisi
Duration: 1:20”
Text: English, Song of Songs
Difficulty: ★

Performance History: premiered at Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church 25/07/18. This work has been chosen as repertoire for the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music May 2019.

About: A simple setting of text from Song of Songs, written for my wife.




*Emmanuel Carol*

Year: 2017
Voices: Three separate vocal lines (or two with congregation singing the third)
Duration: 1”
Text: English, Gospel of Matthew and John
Difficulty: ★

Performance History: currently unperformed.

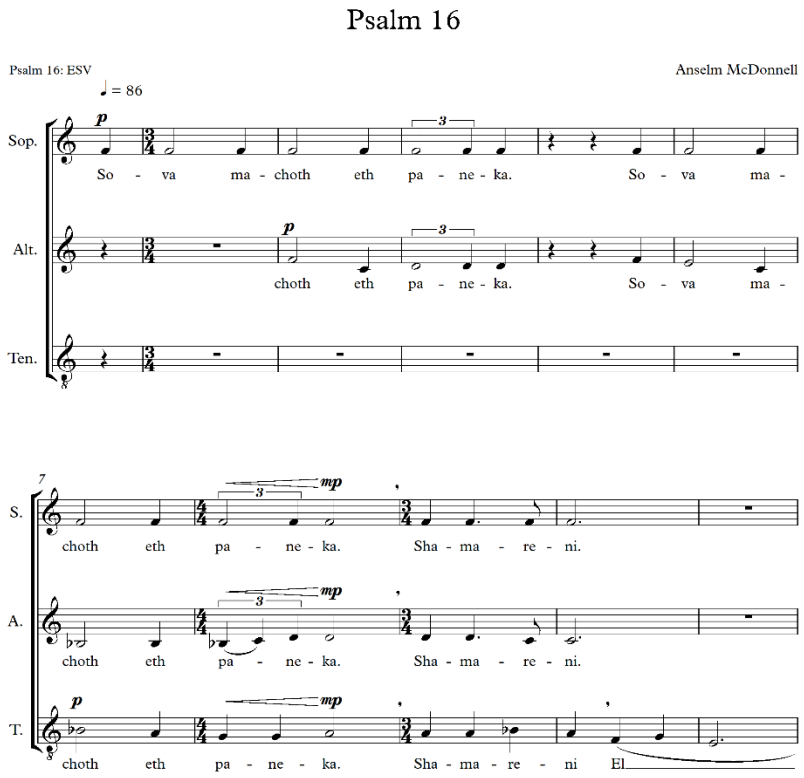
About: A carol built on a repeating cantus firmus, this is a short and easy piece for choirs of any level.

*Psalm 16*

Year: 2016
Voices: SAT
Duration: 4”
Text: Hebrew and English, Translation of Psalm 16
Difficulty: ★ ★

Performance History: premiered at Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church September 2017.

About: Written for a friend’s wedding, *Psalm 16* is a good introduction to the main features of my choral writing, but in a very accessible context.

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