

Program Notes on *River and Tree* by Marina Alexander

During the winter and spring of 2020, months of isolation created by the lockdowns of the COVID pandemic, as a performing musician and conductor, I needed to find another means of “making music.” Where one musical door closes, another often opens, and thus I decided to take advantage of the imposed solitude to enjoy another aspect of my creative work---composition.

As someone who specializes in music with words, it was first necessary to find a text that could inspire my creative process. And thus it was when I encountered Margaret Sangster’s very charming poem, *The River and the Tree*. Her lovely images of swaying branches and rippling currents immediately produced sound equivalents in my ear, and so the writing began. Each verse of the poem has its own set of colors and emotions, as a birch tree and its neighboring river explore their admiration of each other. Their growing acquaintance soon becomes a deep and profound friendship.

My challenge was to bring this encounter alive, in the musical figurations, and in the interaction of the singing voices. This is achieved through dialogues in the early verses, and then all the singers coming together in the last verse to celebrate the new appreciation of the river and the tree for each other.

The poem itself is a lovely allegory of how all too often we assume we have nothing in common with someone we perceive as ‘different’ from ourselves. It reassures us that, if we open our minds and hearts and truly look at the essence of that other person, we will find much that we as human beings value and share---a need for connection, for respect, and for friendship. I hope that my setting of *River and Tree* takes listeners on a journey of beautiful music and quiet joy.