Songs of Long Ago

Choral Suite

Based on Poetry of James Whitcomb Riley

Wm. Spencer-Pierce (ASCAP)



James Whitcomb Riley (1849–1916) was an Indiana literary legend and one of the best-known cultural figures of his era. Known as the "Hoosier Bard," Riley was widely recognized as Indiana's poet laureate. His work occupies a prominent place in the *Golden Age of Indiana Literature*, most notably for its distinctive use of dialect and regional voice.

Riley attracted a nationwide following by building a unique personal brand with his homespun "dialect" poetry. In his day, he attained rock star status; his book sales soared as he did poetry readings on the lecture circuits alongside notables such as Mark Twain and William Jennings Bryan.

His poems evoke the rural Indiana landscape at the turn of the 20th century, portraying familiar scenes of childhood adventure, memorable characters, and lazy summer days, all shaped by the rhythms of everyday speech.

Although Riley's language and cultural assumptions are clearly dated, his poems still hold a distinctive place in Indiana lore. They capture the Midwestern spirit and preserve a particular vision of Hoosier life that remains central to his legacy.

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Composer's Note

When I was an Indiana schoolboy in the 1960s, it seemed as though nearly everyone had a copy or two of James Whitcomb Riley's poems. For this piece, I drew on books inherited from my grandmother.

Riley's trademark is his vivid language, filled with colorful allusions to country life. His playful rhythms lend themselves naturally to singing, making the music accessible and fun to perform.

The main challenge is Riley's highly distinctive spelling, which takes time to decode. Editorial changes have been kept to a minimum so the character of the poems remains intact.

Included in this set:

SATB and SAB versions

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Songs of Long Ago

Stanzas for a New Song

James Whitcomb Riley

duration: about 12 min.

Wm. Spencer-Pierce
(ASCAP)



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When the World Busts Through

Casually Suggested by an Earthquake



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The Used-to-Be



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This movement is based on the first of two "Land of Used-to-Be" poems by Riley. The bridge is paraphrased from his poem "At Utter Loaf".



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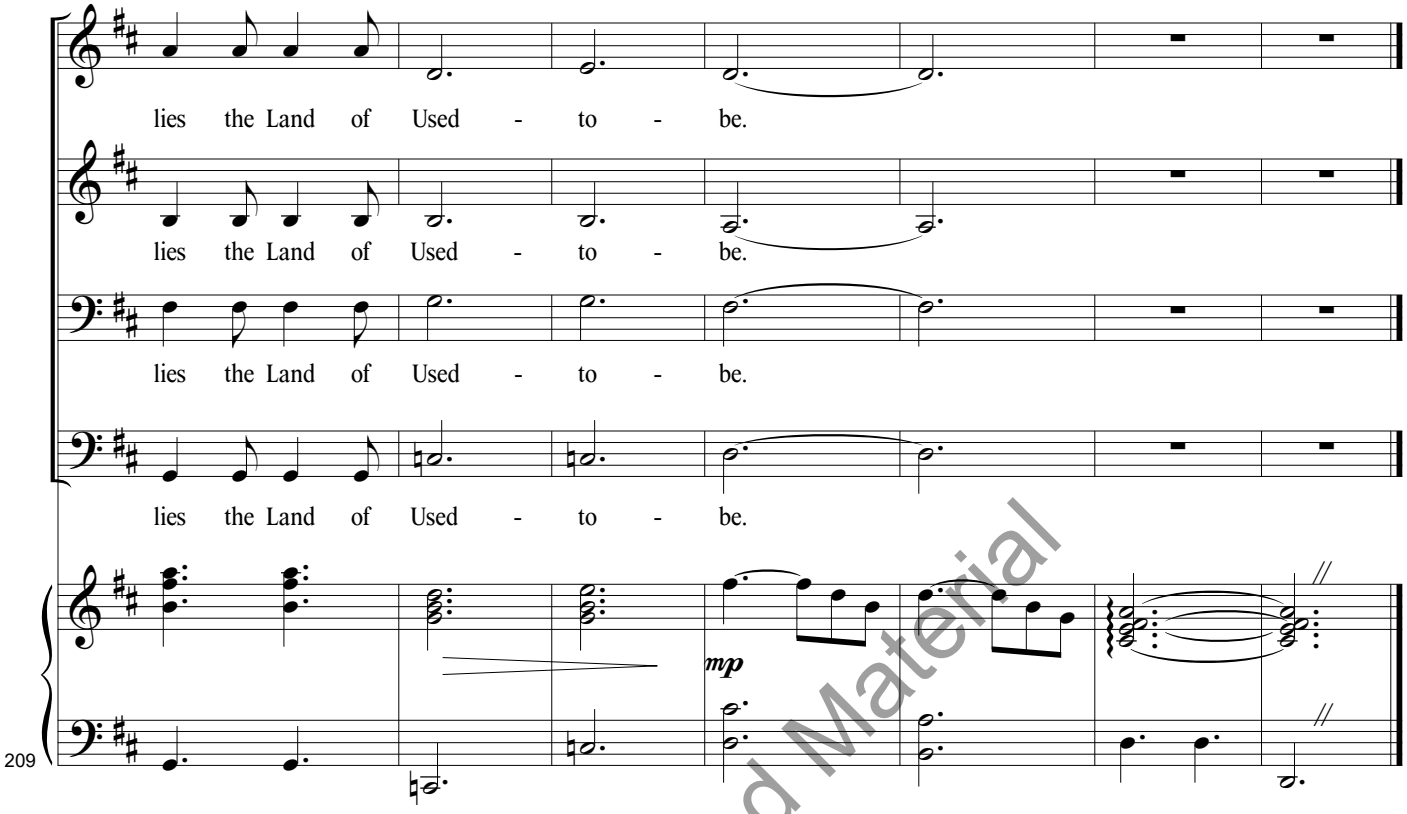




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