

# The Want Of Peace

SSAATTBB Choir A Cappella

Music by

Matthew John Olson

Text by

Wendell Berry

## The Poem

The writings of Wendell Berry (b. 1934) stand as an autonomous voice in American literature today. His many novels, essays, poetry collections, and speeches interweave nostalgia for a lost harmony amidst humanity and the earth we inhabit. Poems, including *The Want of Peace*, interplay pressing environmental concerns against a broader cultural anxiety pining for relief – a yearning for both inner and outer peace. In his masterworks, one can vicariously experience the alternative lifestyle that he’s chosen; to this day, he lives without computer or cell phone upon the land that he farms in Kentucky. This poem is used with his gracious permission – a letter scribed on a typewriter and delivered the old fashioned way, via the postal service.

### *The Want of Peace*

All goes back to the earth,  
and so I do not desire  
pride of excess or power,  
but the contentments made  
by men who have had little:  
the fisherman’s silence  
receiving the river’s grace,  
the gardener’s musing on rows.

I lack the peace of simple things.  
I am never wholly in place.  
I find no peace or grace.  
We sell the world to buy fire,  
our way lighted by burning men,  
and that has bent my mind  
and made me think of darkness  
(and wish for the dumb life of roots).

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## The Composition

This setting of *The Want of Peace* strives to honor the values that guide Mr. Berry’s lifelong work. It juxtaposes a yearning for both human and environmental harmony, and explores the interrelation between unsustainable environmental policy and unsustainable cultural anxiety.

It embraces a metaphoric ambiguity alive in the poem, as if Mr. Berry intended to plant a seed within each of us that grows questions regarding the broader interconnectedness of our human race – how our compassion for self, neighbor, land, and lifestyle are interwoven beyond our deepest comprehension.

for Magnum Chorum on their 25th Anniversary

# The Want of Peace

Words by  
Wendell Berry

Music by  
Matthew J Olson

*♩ = 40 with poignant simplicity...*

*p* **PERUSAL SCORE** *mp* **PERUSAL SCORE** *accel.*

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass  
Piano (for rehearsal only)

All goes back to the earth, so I do not desire pride of excess or of

All goes back to the earth, so I do not desire pride of excess or of

All goes back to the earth, so I do not desire pride of excess or of  
(emerging seamlessly) *p* *mp*

so I do not desire pride of excess or of

*♩ = 44*

5

S1  
S2  
A  
T1  
T2  
B  
Pno.

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

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

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

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

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

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

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle the

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle

pow'r, pow'r, But the contentments made by men who have had lit-tle

**PERUSAL SCORE**

9  $\text{♩} = 50$  Slightly faster...

S  
ooh re - cei ving the ri - ver's grace, the garde-ner's mu-sing on

A  
fish - er-man's si - lence re - cei ving the ri - ver's grace, the garde-ner's mu-sing on

T  
ooh the garde-ner's mu-sing on

B  
ooh the garde-ner's mu-sing on

Pno.

rit. . . .  $\text{♩} = 76$  with escalating anxiety...

14 *mf* *P*

S  
rows. I lack the peace of sim - ple things. I'm ne - ver who-lly

A  
rows. I lack the peace of sim - ple things. I'm ne - ver who-lly

T  
rows. ooh

B  
rows.

Pno.

# PERUSAL SCORE

20 (only Sop 1) *m*

S1 I find \_\_\_\_\_ no peace \_\_\_\_\_ I find no grace \_\_\_\_\_ I

A in \_\_\_\_\_ place. I lack\_ the peace of sim - ple things. I'm ne - ver who-ly in \_\_\_\_\_ place. I

T \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

25

S1 find \_\_\_\_\_ no peace \_\_\_\_\_ I find no grace \_\_\_\_\_ I find \_\_\_\_\_ no

S2 *mp* I \_\_\_\_\_ find no \_\_\_\_\_ peace \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ grace \_\_\_\_\_ I *mf* (S2) (S3)

A1 lack\_ the peace of sim - ple things I'm ne - ver who-ly in \_\_\_\_\_ place \_\_\_\_\_ I lack\_ the peace of *mf* (T2)

A2 \_\_\_\_\_

T1 *mp* \_\_\_\_\_ I lack the peace *mf*

T2 \_\_\_\_\_ We sell \_\_\_\_\_ the *mf*

B1 *mp* (only B1) \_\_\_\_\_ We sell \_\_\_\_\_ the *mf*

B2 \_\_\_\_\_ We sell \_\_\_\_\_ the *mf*

Pno.

30 *f*, *mf*

S1 peace I find no grace our way

S2 find no peace or grace our way

S3 *mf* We sell the world to buy fire, our way

A1 *f*, *mf* sim - ple things. I'm ne - ver who - lly in place. Our way

A2 *f*, *mf* of sim - ple things I'm ne - ver who - lly in place. Our way

T1 *f*, *mf* world to buy fire, Our way

T2 *f*, *mf* world to buy fire, Our way

B1 *f*, *mf* world to buy fire, Our way

B2 *f*, *mf* world to buy fire, Our way

Pno.

PERUSAL SCORE

rit.

# PERUSAL SCORE

S1 *rit.* 34 ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

S2 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

S3 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

A1 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

A2 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

T1 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

T2 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

B1 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

B2 *ff* ligh - ted by bur - ning men, \_\_\_\_\_

Pno. *ff*

# PERUSAL SCORE

$\text{♩} = 58$  with *reject* or *dispar*  
*stagger* *and* *the*

40

*mp*

S1 *oooh* *sliding subtly between notes...*

S2 *p* *oooh* *stagger breathe*

A *mp* and that has

T *mp* *stagger breathe* *oooh* *sliding subtly between notes...*

B *p* *oooh* *stagger breathe*

Pno.

45

S1

S2

A *bent* *my* *mind* and *made* *me* *think*

T

B

Pno.



49 *mf*

Sop. Solo

S1

S2

A

T

B

Pno.

of dark - ness and made me think

PERUSAL SCORE

3

53 *mp*

Sop. Solo

S1

S2

A

T

B

Pno.

ah ah

of dark - ness

PERUSAL SCORE

57

Sop. Solo

S1

S2

T

B

Pno.

PERUSAL SCORE

60

S1

S2

T

B

Pno.