

Break, Break, Break Program Information

Break, break, break

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Break, break, break
On thy cold grey stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of voice that is still!

Break, break, break
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

Program Notes

“Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892), the most famous poet of the Victorian age, was a profound spokesman for the ideas and values of his times.” (Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2001.)

Break, break, break was written in response to the sudden death at an early age of his closest friend, Arthur Hallam. The poem is full of sudden shifts of imagery that are reflected in the musical setting. Rather than ending in resignation and acceptance, the setting ends in defiance.

Originally written for chorus (SATB) and piano, *Break, break, break* has also been arranged for large brass ensemble (5 trumpets, 5 horns, 3 trombones, euphonium and 2 tubas) divided into three groups. The first (2 trumpets, trombone and euphonium) generally represents the chorus, while the second (2 trumpets, 2 horns, trombone and tuba) and third (trumpet, 3 horns, bass trombone and tuba) provide antiphonal accompaniment.

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