

Hands
SSAA, 2 soloists, a cappella
JH - C034.1

Jocelyn Hagen

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Hands

SSAA choir, 2 soloists, a cappella



jocelyn hagen

About “Hands”

In 2016 I was honored to receive a commission from the International Federation of Choral Music for a performance at the World Choral Symposium in Barcelona in July of 2017. The theme for the symposium was “The Colors of Peace,” and I was tasked with creating a new work based that theme, to be sung by the Vocal Art Ensemble of Sweden (Jan Yngwe, conductor).

It was an incredibly exciting commission, but I must admit that I was stuck right at the gate. The first thing I do when beginning a new piece of vocal music is pick a text. But what text could I choose that would represent all the musicians attending the conference? Most of the attendees would be speaking English, but for some reason choosing a text in English didn’t feel right to me. It felt too limited.

I was pondering this while in Chicago attending a different conference. I spent an evening with a dear friend strolling through the crowded streets. We don’t see each other often and were so happy to be spending time together that we were happily walking the street holding hands. Then it dawned on me! *This* is what the piece needs to be about: a simple gesture, the act of uniting, coming together.

It is no surprise that this idea struck me very deeply in this moment. The United States is in deep turmoil right now and feels more divided than ever. There is heavy judgement on both sides, leaving very little room to be stuck in the middle. Because of this, our nation has not been peaceful as of late. I do not pretend to know the solution to this problem, but I do feel that there should be less talking and accusing, and more listening. The act of unity is the foundation for peace, and it’s the reason I chose to create “Hands” in this way.

“Hands” is a vocalise, a song without words. I started the writing process just by singing to myself. My mother told me that, as a child, she could always tell when I was happy because I was singing. I wanted this melody to have the same kind of spontaneous joy.

Because I want the vowels to feel natural in every language, each performing ensemble may choose which vowels to sing. When I composed the opening melody, the vowel that came naturally to me was a shallow version of an “uh” vowel, like the word “cut,” but with a more “pop” color. When the Vocal Art Ensemble of Sweden sang it, the conductor chose a pure “ah.” I love both versions, as well as the opportunity for wider diversity.

The movement instructions for “Hands” are printed in the score, and these simple movements have a profound effect on the audience. At the beginning, a soloist stands in front, singing completely alone. It is impossible not to watch this brave soul, beginning a piece, starting a movement, on their own. That soloist is later joined by a second voice, stepping forward and away from the choir. The same melody is sung, except now it’s joined in beautiful counterpoint as a duet. Then, gradually, other voices join in, expanding upon the melody and moving forward into an abstract mixed formation. Twenty-five measures into the piece the movement becomes static, and all choir members are singing a new melody, facing confidently outward. They are a group, united. They fill the space with bigger, more colorful chords, extending their range, and climaxing with soaring high notes for the sopranos. The loud chord rings, the original melody begins again, and the singers change formation. This time they head to the front of the stage, close to the audience, and one by one they begin joining hands with each other. They have found their common ground. They are all harmonizing this one melody. They are standing strong together.

~ Jocelyn Hagen (September 2017)

SSAA arrangement co-commissioned by Myriad Ensemble & Elektra Women's Choir for our choral sisters in song.
During difficult times, may singing together be our solace, provide joyful moments, and serve as a reminder we are not alone.

Hands

SSAA div. a cappella choir & 2 soloists

Jocelyn Hagen

Do not photocopy.

For perusal only.

Simply, with minimal use of vibrato throughout
Freely ♩ = 54

Solo *mf* *f*

**choir begins in standard, formal formation, with the soloist out front*

a little faster, with rubato

♩ = 56

6 *mf* *mf*

**second soloist joins first soloist in front, in close formation*

Solo *mf*

slight rit.-----

11 *f* *mf*

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16 *Steady* ♩ = 56

mp

mp

S *mp* 2 singers 3 singers

A *p* a few altos, adding more with each measure

A a few altos *p* *mp*

*choir members begin to join the soloists gradually, separating from the original formation and joining them closer to the front of the stage

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22

soloists join chorus

S *tutti* *p* in the distance *legato*

S *tutti* *mf*

A *tutti* *mf* 3

A *tutti* *mf* 3 3

*choir stops moving, settling into a mixed formation abstractly placed upon the stage

27

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33

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Slow ♩ = 50

38

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*choir begins to form a line (or 2 lines) across the front of the stage, joining hands as they reach their destination

43

48

Performance Notes:

1. Soloists and choir are to sing on neutral syllables throughout, decided upon by the conductor.
 - ~ The conductor is encouraged to choose vowels and syllables that reflect the choir's native language.
 - ~ These vowels/syllables may change throughout the piece.
 - ~ Lyrical lines should be sung without consonants, with one exception: singers are allowed to sing a slight "H" at the beginnings of phrases in the higher register.
 - ~ Rhythmic lines can be sung with a subtle consonant, for example: "da, da, da."

2. Pay close attention to the notes (marked with an *) on the choir formation, they are vital to the performance of the work.

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j o c e l y n h a g e n



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Jocelyn Hagen



Jocelyn Hagen composes music that has been described as “simply magical” (Fanfare Magazine) and “dramatic and deeply moving” (Star Tribune, Minneapolis/St. Paul). She is a pioneer in the field of composition, pushing the expectations of musicians and audiences with large-scale multimedia works, electro-acoustic music, dance, opera, and publishing. Her first forays into composition were via songwriting, still very evident in her work. The majority of her compositions are for the voice: solo, chamber and choral. Her melodic music is rhythmically driven and texturally complex, rich in color and deeply heartfelt.

In 2019 and 2020, choirs and orchestras across the country are premiering her multimedia symphony *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* that includes video projections created by a team of visual artists, highlighting da Vinci’s spectacular drawings, inventions, and texts. Hagen describes her process of composing for choir, orchestra and film simultaneously in a Tedx Talk given at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, now available on YouTube. Her dance opera collaboration with choreographer Penelope Freeh, *Test Pilot*, received the 2017 American Prize in the musical theater/opera division as well as a Sage Award for “Outstanding Design.” The panel declared the work “a tour de force of originality.”

In 2013 Hagen released an EP entitled MASHUP, in which she performs Debussy’s “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum” while singing Ed Sheeran’s “The A Team.” She is also one half of the band Nation, an a cappella duo with composer/performer Timothy C. Takach, and together they perform and serve as clinicians for choirs from all over the world.

Hagen’s commissions include *Conspirare*, the Minnesota Opera, the Minnesota Orchestra, the International Federation of Choral Music, the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota, Georgia, Connecticut and Texas, the North Dakota Music Teachers Association, Cantus, the Boston Brass, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra and the St. Olaf Band, among many others. Her work is independently published through JH Music, as well as through Graphite Publishing, G. Schirmer, ECS Publishing, Fred Bock Music Publishing, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, and Boosey and Hawkes.

Independently published choral works by Jocelyn Hagen:

Agnus Dei, from <i>Ashes of Roses</i>	TTB div. a cappella, Bar. solo
April and the Sun	SATB a cappella choir
Benedictus, from <i>amass</i>	SSAATTBB a cappella choir, SATB soli
Divine Image	treble choir, women’s choir, SSATB choir, oboe and piano
Endless	SATB choir, 2 violins and piano
Forgotten	SSA choir, oboe and piano
I Saw Two Clouds at Morning	SSAATTBB a cappella choir
Ladies in Green	SSA choir and piano
Moon Goddess	SSA choir, 4-hand piano, percussion
Numeri Atque Voces	TTBB and SATB choirs
On My Dreams	SATB div. choir, piano, opt. trap set
Ophelia	SATB a cappella choir
Prayer	SA div. choir, violin and piano
Salve, Regina	SSA a cappella choir
Sanctus, from <i>amass</i>	SSATBB a cappella choir, SA soli
Someone Will Remember Us	SSAA choir, violin, viola, cello and harp
Trees Need Not Walk the Earth	SATB choir, piano, marimba & rain stick
Veni, Sancte Spiritus	SATB a cappella choir

Extended works for chorus

Ashes of Roses (48’)	requiem for SATB choir, orchestra, and soloists
amass (65’)	SATB choir, STB soli, cello solo, cello quartet, guitar and percussion trio
The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci (35’)	SATB choir, orchestra or chamber orchestra, video projections
Songs for Muska (70’)	SATB choir, soloists, violin, cello, mandolin, harp, 2 percussionists
Swimming Into Winter (17’)	SATB (divisi) choir, winds and percussion