

UNH Professor Dedicates Original Composition to Families of Newtown, Conn.

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When University of New Hampshire professor David Ripley's son was 3, the child fell asleep upon the couch in a timber-frame house his father was building for the family. As Ripley looked down upon his son that day curled up, he said to himself, "My God, if I could put that into a song." Later that day, the lyric came to him.

The Sleeping of a Child

David Ripley

The musical score is for a five-part chorus and piano. It features seven staves: Soprano Solo, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone Solo, Bass, and Piano. The lyrics are: "There's noth-ing in the world like the Noth-ing... Noth-ing... Noth-ing... Noth-ing like the Noth-ing... Noth-ing like the Noth-ing... Noth-ing oo... Noth-ing oo..."

Ripley, a professor of music at UNH who specializes in voice and opera, recorded the original composition, "The Sleeping of a Child," on his 1990 "Mustard Seed, Songs of Faith" recording. For many years, he thought about arranging it for choir, but never did - until the tragedy in Newtown, Conn.

"I had to respond in some way to this horrific event. That was the catalyst for my decision to arrange the song for the UNH Concert Choir, which I will be directing this spring while their regular conductor, Bill Kempster, is on leave. This, I hope, will be a response, among others I am sure, from the entire UNH community to the tragedy of the Newtown massacre," Ripley says.

"I feel it is so important that we, as a society, find artistic ways that are beautiful and healing to respond to the Newtown tragedy beyond the arguments about gun control. I feel that these gestures that are imbued with conscience and priorities can speak as forcefully as any politician, perhaps more so," he says.

On Sunday, May 5, 2013, the UNH Concert Choir premieres the new arrangement of "The Sleeping of a Child." Originally for solo, unaccompanied voice, it is now for five-part chorus, solo soprano, baritone, and harp. It will be dedicated to the families of Newtown, Conn., and the national effort to lessen gun violence in American society. The choir will perform Ripley's piece under his direction as part of a program titled "A New Created World, The Joys of Papa Haydn", after his oratorio, "The Creation." The concert starts at 3 p.m. in the Johnson Theater of the UNH Paul Creative Arts Center. The program is free and open to the public.

"It is quite remarkable how these efforts, which are really collaborative in their scope, are facilitated by the resources of the university. I could never have done this without those resources. And, who knew that they would ever be needed for such a thing, to respond to such a horrific event," Ripley says.

Jazz pianist Brian Raymond, a graduate student in music education, electronically adapted Ripley’s hand-written score using a computer and helped create the voice and harp parts. “It has been a pleasure working with David on this piece, and it’s certainly an honor to be involved in a project that commemorates such a sad tragedy. I’m enjoying the progress that is being made by the choir and really looking forward to the concert performance,” Raymond says.

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