

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition:

Charlottie – SATB or vocal solo and piano

Date: 1968

Duration: 8:10

Recording: by ?

Program Note:

In the words of Carl Sandburg, “An old ballad is often like an old silver dagger or an old brass pistol; it is rusty, or greenish; it is ominous with ancient fates still operating today.” The ballad of vain Charlottie and her fateful adventure on a winter's night is a universal one amongst northern peoples. This version is from an isolated mountain region of Georgia. In it the tale is told of Charlottie who, because of her vanity, freezes to death on the way to a ball with her lover. There are three different melodies in it; the main tune, a secondary and a subordinate one. They appear randomly. ABA/CA/BA/SBA Each time tune A appears it is intact but the accompanying textures vary to match the mood and drama of the text. The piece is tonal and makes use of the Aeolian and Dorian modes giving it a simple folk-song character. An unobtrusive piano part accompanies the singing. Its main purpose is to give pitch help to singers and to add a general tone painting for the text.

Text:

Charlottie lived on a mountain top in a bleak and lonely spot,
There were no other dwellings there except her father's cot.
And yet on many a wintry night young swains were gathered there;
Her father kept a social board and she was very fair.
On a New Year's Eve as the sun went down, far looked her wistful eye
Out from the frosty window pane as a merry sleigh went by
At a village fifteen miles away was to be a ball that night.
And tho' the air was piercing cold her heart was warm and light.
How brightly gleamed her laughing eye, as a well-known voice she heard
And dashing up to the cottage door her lover's sleigh appeared.
“Oh, daughter dear,” Her mother cried, “This blanket round you fold,
Tonight is such a dreadful night. You'll get your death of cold.”
“Oh, nay, oh, nay,” Charlottie cried as she laughed like a gypsy queen,
“To ride in blankets all muffed up I never would be seen.
My silken cloak is quite enough, you know 'tis lined throughout
And there's my silken scarf to twine my head and neck about.”
Her bonnet and gloves, she put them on.
A parting word, then she leaped into the sleigh.
Swiftly down the mountain side o'er the hills,
With muffled beat so silently five miles at length were passed.
With a few and shivering words the silence he broke at last.
“Such a dreadful night I never saw, see the reins I scarce can hold,”

Charlottie faintly then replied, "I am exceedingly cold."
He cracked his whip, he urged his steeds much faster than before;
And thus five other weary miles in silence were passed o'er.
Said Charles: "How fast the shivering ice is gath'ring on my brow."
Charlott' then faintly cried. "I'm growing warmer now."
Thus oh they rode, through frosty air and the glittering cold starlight,
Until at last the village lights and the ballroom came in sight.
They reached the door and Charles sprang out, he reached his hand to her
"Why set you there like a monoment that has no power to stir?"
He called her once, he called her twice. She answered not a word;
He asked her for her hands, but still she never stirred.
He took her hand in his, twas cold and hard as any stone.
He tore the mantle from her face. The cold stars o'er it shone.
Then quickly to the lighted hall her lifeless form he bore;
Charlottie's eyes had closed for aye. Her voice was heard no more.
And there he sat down by her side, while bitter tears did flow.
And cried, "My own, my charming bride, tis you may never know."
He twined his arms around her neck. He kissed her marble brow;
His thoughts flew back to where she said,
"I'm growing warmer now."