

# MOUNTAIN CHANT

Three Sacred Choruses for SATB (with piano reduction)

On 27 June 1818 the explorer John Oxley became the first European to set eyes on the Warrumbungle mountains in north-eastern New South Wales. His journal reveals the deep impression made by this "most stupendous range of mountains, lifting their blue heads above the horizon". Surely the peaks and bluffs reminded him of the spires and towers of his homeland after the "boundless desert" which he and his party had been travelling for so long.

Fred Watson's poem Mountain Chant, which provides the text of the central chorus, juxtaposes European and Celtic imagery associated with the Warrumbungles with the names of Dreaming sites of the indigenous people for whom the mountains were a continuous divine revelation. Vividly and precipitantly rhythmic, it is framed by two stark, interior motets: the first a setting in Latin of *O quam preciosa* by the 12th century Rhineland mystic, Hildegard von Bingen, whose startlingly fresh imagery of spiritual regeneration I found irresistible; and to conclude, *The Lord's Prayer*, also in Latin: a profound documentation of the universal path to self-transformation and enlightenment.

Mountain Chant, composed at a time when Australia seems more than ever in need of spiritual regeneration, was jointly commissioned by two leading Australian choirs: Cantillation & the Melbourne Chorale, each of which received assistance from the Australia Council. It is dedicated to my friend and collaborator, Fred Watson, Astronomer-in-Charge of the Anglo-Australian Observatory at Siding Spring in the Warrumbungles, who also provided the text of my choral Fourth Symphony, Star Chant.

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Duration: c. 14 mins

Each of the three pieces may be performed on its own.