

## **Dreams**

**Music by Rollo Dilworth (b. 1970)**

Text from "Dreams" by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

### **Background**

"Langston Hughes (1902-1967) is considered one of the most prolific and powerful African-American writers in 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature. His verses often reflected the experiences that spoke directly to the societal issues at hand, including politics, religion, and racial equality.

"*"Dreams"* was written in the 1920's, during the early period of Hughes' career. It was during this decade in which Langston's travels became an inspiration for his writing, whether it was to a local club in New York City's Harlem neighborhood or to a cabaret in Paris. These travel experiences exposed a young Hughes to many musical styles, including idioms that reflected his own culture. As a result of these immersion experiences, much of Hughes' poetry draws from the rhythmic nuances (spoken and sung) that are rooted in musical styles from African-American culture – specifically, blues and jazz."<sup>1</sup>

### **Recordings**

Northwest Girlchoir – stunning: <https://youtu.be/AUM0SgNvzPI>

### **Program Notes**

*Dreams* composed by Rollo Dilworth, is a setting of a text of the same name by Langston Hughes. Hughes (1902-1967) was part of the Harlem Renaissance, a particularly fruitful time in culture and social thought, centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this period is associated with African Americans, its impact was felt throughout the United States and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> Rollo Dilworth, *Dreams*, Hal Leonard Corporation, 2004, p. 4.

Much of Hughes' poetry draws from the rhythmic nuances (spoken and sung) that are rooted in musical styles from African-American culture – specifically, blues and jazz.<sup>2</sup>

The composer has taken these influences to heart in his setting of the text. The composer's use of extended harmonies bring a jazz-like sound to the piece, and the melody has a modal, somewhat bluesy feel to it. The strophic structure of the original poem is adhered to musically. The strophic structure of the original poem is adhered to musically. The composer has added an ostinato set to the words "Hold fast" to frame the piece at the beginning and the end.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rollo Dilworth, Dreams, Hal Leonard Corporation, 2004, p. 2.

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## Analysis

Key: em

Meter: 6/8

Form: Modified strophic

Compositional elements:

The composer has infused this piece with elements of jazz and blues. The composer's use of extended harmonies bring a jazz-like sound to the piece, and the melody has a modal, somewhat bluesy feel to it. The strophic structure of the original poem is adhered to musically. The composer has added an ostinato set to the words "Hold fast" to frame the piece at the beginning and the end. This ostinato first appears at ms. 5 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
Intro	1-4	piano
Ostinato introduced	5-8	sung by part two – this is a one measure ostinato pattern
Verse 1 and 2	9-30	Begins with part one singing over ostinato in part two; after ms 9 the two parts alternate taking the melody while the other part harmonizes; when the repeat is taken for the second verse, a descant is added
coda	31-42	31 – 38 – the two parts sing the ostinato pattern in canon – one beat apart 39-42 – final cadence