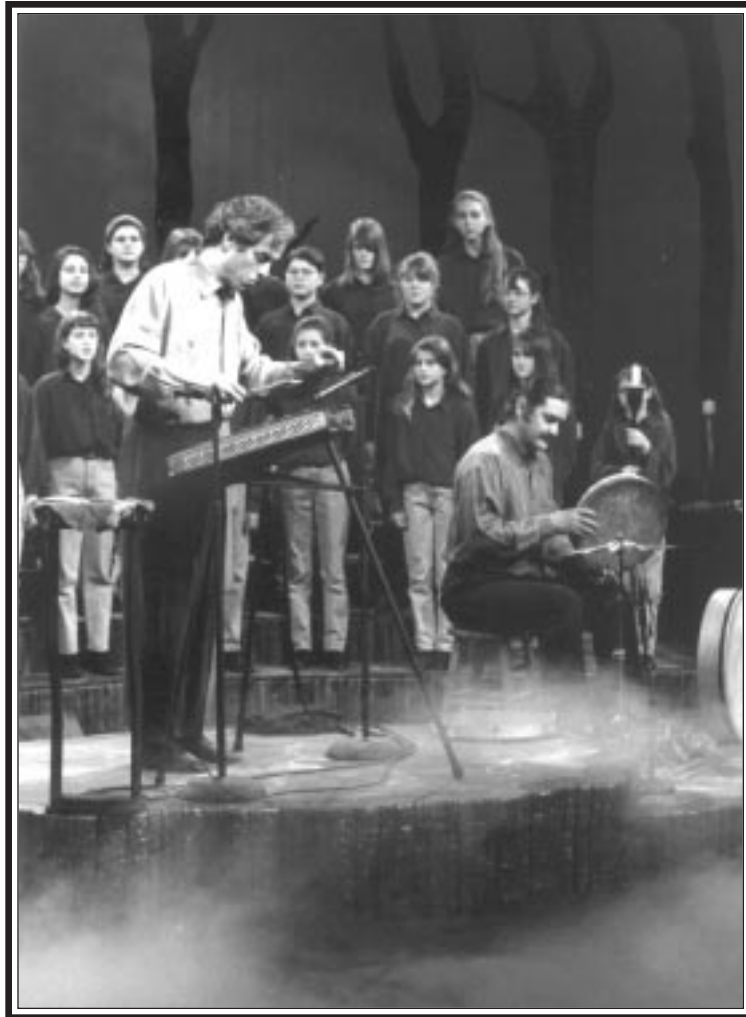


I go amazed into the maze



*A Teacher's Guide
to HYMNODY OF EARTH*

Monday, November 8 at 8:00/7:00 pm CT



The Kentucky
Network

Hymnody of Earth is a co-production of KET
and the Kentucky Center for the Arts.

Producer: Guy Mendes
Director: H. Russell Farmer
Associate Producer: Charlee Heaton
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The Program

Kentucky Center Presents: Hymnody of Earth takes the poetry of Kentucky writer and farmer Wendell Berry and puts it to music. Composer Malcolm Dalglish has put together a chorus of young people to sing about a deep love for the earth and the people and creatures who inhabit it.

The program records both a particular experience—a performance—and a process: a sharing between two artists growing out of an initial gift from the earth. A poem begins with Berry's encounter with a natural image; for example, the winter finch. Then Dalglish encounters Berry's poem about the finch, and a song begins. The exchange among the earth, a poet, a musician, a chorus of young people, and finally a television audience weaves a rich fabric, and the quality of the weaving deserves our study.

In the classroom, that study can take many forms. First, *Hymnody* can be broken down into elements—the poems, the songs, the voices, the instruments—and those elements studied for their individual qualities. What do the poems say? What imagery and themes are common to them? What is distinctive about young people's voices? About the sound of a hammer dulcimer?

Those questions will lead to others about the choices made during the creative process. Why did the composer specifically write his songs for a children's chorus rather than an adult choir? How did the television producer choose to illustrate the poems? Would you have made different choices? How is hearing a poem sung different from reading it to yourself? From hearing it read aloud?

Ultimately, the discussion should lead to the idea that the whole of *Hymnody* is something more than—and something different from—the sum of its parts. Once words, music, choir, stage set, and visuals are combined, what is created is a completely new piece of art. Wendell Berry, for his part, has said: "Words and music, I assume, began together. In poetry, words remember song. In my own work, for a long time, the words have seemed to be in search of their native or appropriate music. And so I am delighted that Malcolm Dalglish, too, heard them that way and supplied the music. His music and the ... voices give the poems a completeness that I desired but did not imagine."

Elements

The word "hymnody" means a collection of hymns, a gathering of sacred songs and verses. Students may think of "hymns" as rather solemn songs sung in church. But the word not only evokes reverence, but also announces joy and celebration through the union of words and music. Because of these feelings of meditation and joy, Malcolm Dalglish has said that "Wendell Berry's poems seem naturally to take flight in hymn song."

The musical instruments used in *Hymnody* may not be familiar to students, but they have long, rich histories of their own. The hammer dulcimer is an ancient instrument, the ancestor of the piano, dating back to around 2000 B.C. Of its sound, Dalglish says, "The dance of the mallets on the sea of strings is bright, delicate, primitive, simple, and somewhat mysterious and unpredictable."

The frame drum, played by Glen Velez during *Hymnody*, "is one of the oldest kinds of drum, just as the hammer dulcimer is the oldest form of percussive string instrument," Dalglish says. "Frame drums and shakers bring a broader percussive counterpart to the delicacy of the hammer dulcimer, and an earthy vitality to the ethereal sounds of the choir."

Those ethereal sounds are provided by The Bloomington Youth Chorus, The Lexington Children's Chorus, and The Anglicantors. The combined chorus is conducted by internationally acclaimed children's choir director and music educator Mary Goetze. "A child's voice," Dalglish says, "is a pure, unself-conscious, and yet powerful instrument, a sound that for many years has transcended the boundaries of culture or language. Among these changed and changing voices, I am reminded of Wendell Berry's words in 'Thrush Song': 'Move my mind now to that which holds things as they change.'"

The final element of the television production of *Hymnody* is the stark black and white photographs of natural images and scenes that provide a canvas for the poetry and the music. Often, the photos are of seemingly simple objects—trees, rivers, ponds, a barn on a hill—but the words of the poetry being read in the background bring out the intricacies of the photographs. Berry's poems can be thought of as records of his encounters with the natural world around him and of how those encounters have affected him. Like the photographs, they often show and celebrate the complex nestled within the simple.

Meanings

While each of these elements—the poetry, the hammer dulcimer, the frame drum, the voices of children, the photographs—makes its own independent offering, they work together to create something greater than any one of them. The final form is intricate, containing within it the almost primitive sound of Velez's percussion; the ethereal sound of the hammer dulcimer; and the soft, angelic voices of the chorus uniting with Berry's profound poetry and the humble feel of traditional Shaker hymns.

One topic for discussion might be the idea of balance: How did poet, composer, performers, and television producer strike a balance among the elements to keep any one from overwhelming the others? How would the total experience of *Hymnody* be different if any one of them were missing?

Balance is also an important theme in Berry's poetry. Dalglish has described it this way: "Through his words, we gain an appreciation for the delicate balance among many cycles of life that we humans are given privilege to explore, enjoy, and share as we become natives to our various places on Earth." What did he mean? Talk about specific passages in relation to this idea.

Another of Berry's most heartfelt themes, in his short stories and essays as well as his poems, is the importance of place—of feeling *connected* to a place, a community, the land itself. Can you find this idea in the poems from *Hymnody of Earth*?

But a person's "country" is not necessarily defined by geography. "Walking at Night," for example, is an adaptation of a well-known poem in which Berry speaks of marriage as a "country" known and in some ways defined by its images. What images define a student's "country"? What ideas and forms and feelings commingle to shape a student's world? *Hymnody of Earth* offers students a rich opportunity to explore their worlds, to seek images that speak to them, to be amazed by the maze around them, and to see the harmony that binds their worlds together.

A Suggested Activity

Hymnody producer Guy Mendes has taken photographic images and matched them with Berry's poetry to produce what he calls a "poetry video." He found it a challenging task.

"It would be easy to look for 'greeting card' or stereotyped images," Mendes said, "and it would also be easy to find images that are too literal. I tried to just get a feel; I wanted visuals to present a more generalized feeling."

Mendes, who has published several volumes of photographs, looked through some of his own photographs, file footage from KET archives, and even some NASA photos to find images to match Berry's moods and transitions. For example, with "The Peace of Wild Things," he tried to be more "abstract" to correspond to Berry's oblique tone.

"Early in the poem, Berry is despairing, so I began with a spooky image from an old photograph of mine," Mendes said. "Then I found an image of seeds and bean sprouts, since Berry was talking about his family. The last image I used was a photograph of a waterfall, which matches Berry's final image. In a sense, the water droplets are the 'day-blind stars.'"

Mendes emphasizes that his use of visual images in connection with the poetry and the music is not intended to create a "wallpaper or window-dressing effect. In a harmony, there is sometimes a lead voice; in these poetry videos, Berry is definitely the lead voice."

To explore the kinds of creative choices Mendes made for this production, students can make their own poetry video. They might use poetry from *Hymnody* or add images to another favorite poem or their own poetry. Or they can approach the project from the other end, selecting meaningful visual images and composing new poetry that parallels those images. The images can come from a variety of sources: Images from magazines or films can be captured on video, or students can bring in their own photos.

In the process of creating their video, students will decide whether the poetry or the video will be the lead voice in the harmony they create.

As an extension activity, students may want to consider a video form with which most everyone is familiar: music videos. An interesting exercise would be to compare poetry videos and music videos. If poetry videos often focus on the poetry, do music videos focus on the music? Such an activity could help students evaluate for themselves what they see and what they hear, inviting them to be critical viewers and thinkers.

Special Note to Music Educators

In addition to commercial recordings, *Hymnody of Earth* is available as a musical score. Contact Plymouth Music Co., 170 NE 33rd Street, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334, (305) 563-1844.

Connections to KERA

Hymnody of Earth makes a strong connection to nearly all of KERA's basic learning goals. The program also ties closely to learner outcomes 2.22–2.27, which focus on the arts and humanities core concepts of production, analysis of forms, aesthetics, cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and language. *Hymnody of Earth* would lend itself well to either integrated or thematic instruction.

Poetry and Lyrics

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

(Wendell Berry)

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

PSALM OF SOLSTICE

(Malcolm Dalglish; melody from an old Belgian fiddle tune)

Suspicientes in caelum sub noctem longissimam,
Vigilantes somniamus, sub noctem sanctissimam,
Cantores stellae summae, preces ut mirabiles splendent,
Tranquillus tellus est, cantum omnes audiunt.

Gazing out into the skies, on the eve of the longest night,
Here we dream with open eyes on the eve of a holy night,
Choirs of stars high in the air shine
Like some amazing silent prayer.
The earth is still and calm,
Everyone can hear the psalm.



THE DARK AROUND US

(Wendell Berry)

The dark around us, come,
Let us meet here together,
Members one of another,
Here in our holy room,

Here on our little floor,
Here in the daylit sky,
Rejoicing mind and eye,
Rejoining known and knower,

Light, leaf, foot, hand, and wing,
Such order as we know,
One household, high and low,
And all the earth shall sing.

OVER THE RIVER

(Wendell Berry)

Over the river in loud flood,
in the wind deep and broad
under the unending sky, pair
by pair, the swallows again,
with tender exactitude,
play out their line
in arcs laid on the air,
as soon as made, not there.

HARMONY OF EARTH

(Wendell Berry)

Harmony of earth is Heaven-made
Heaven-making, is promise and is prayer,
A little song to keep us unafraid,
An earthly music magnified in air.



THE FINCHES
(Wendell Berry)

The ears stung with cold
sun and frost of dawn
in early April, comes

the song of winter finches,
their crimson bright, then
dark as they move into

and then against the light.
May the year warm them
soon. May they soon go

north with their singing
and the seasons follow.
May the bare sticks soon

live, and our minds go free
of the ground
into the shining of trees.

WINDOW TREE

(words and music by Malcolm and Campbell Dalglish)

From your limbs I see the birds fly
Away with the wind and snow,
Out in that cold wind you are an old friend
Standing outside my window.

And in the morning as I am waking
You pull the darkness from a dream,
I feel beneath you as I look up through
The window pane an old refrain.

Every day you're just as new to me
As the light of the sun,
And in the night I dream with the light
That you hold inside of your leaves.
I hear the birds sing and I know there's a language
In the silence of the earth,
And deep in your rings I know circles of death
Leave histories of new birth.

And out of prayer I stare at the air.
Like a river, it flows over you,
You nod and I have the only sensation
That what stands true will continue.

FOR THE FUTURE

(Wendell Berry)

Planting trees early in spring,
we make a place for birds to sing
in time to come. How do we know?
They are singing here now.
There is no other guarantee
that singing will ever be.

THRUSH SONG

(Wendell Berry)

Thrush song, stream song, holy love
That flows through earthly forms and folds,
The song of Heaven's Sabbath fleshed
In throat and ear, in stream and stone,
A grace living here as we live,

Move my mind now to that which holds
Things as they change.

Design

Now falls from thought. I go amazed
Into the maze of a design
That mind can follow but not know,
Apparent, plain, and yet unknown,
The outline lost in earth and sky.

GREAT TREES

(Wendell Berry)

Slowly, slowly they return
To the small woodland let alone:
Great trees, outspreading and bright,
Apostles of the living light.

Patient as stars, they build in air
Tier after tier a timbered choir,
Stout beams upholding weightless grace
Of song, a blessing on this place.

They stand in waiting all around,
Uprisings of their native ground.
Downcomings of the distant light;
They are the advent they await.

Receiving sun and giving shade,
Their life's a benefaction made,
And is a benediction said
Over the living and the dead.

In fall their brightened leaves, released,
Fly down the wind, and we are pleased
To walk on radiance, amazed.
O light come down to earth, be praised!

WALKING AT NIGHT

(words adapted from Wendell Berry's "The Country of Marriage")

How many times have I come to you,
Out of my head with joy.

As freely as I breathe
the air that was the wind,
Dreaming I see you there
Along the streams of the country of my birth,
Warm blooms and the night songs of birds
Opening around you.

Walking at night, the water flowing,
Walking at night, through the regions of the dark,
Walking at night, it does not hold us,
Walking at night, we keep returning,
Walking at night, returning thirsty, returning thirsty.

You are the known way leading always to the unknown,
And you are the known place
To which the unknown is always leading me back.

How many times have I come to you,
Out of my head with joy.

To approach you I have given up the light,
A man lost in the woods,
Standing still, saying nothing,
There arose in me like the earth's empowering brew,
Rising in root and branch,
The words of a dream of you.

Walking at night, by the dark water,
Walking at night, the steam is rising,
Walking at night, the moon and the chasing clouds,
Walking at night, the stream of blessings,
Those heavenly blessings, those heavenly blessings.

You are the known way leading always to the unknown,
And you are the known place
To which the unknown is always leading me back.



TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

(Wendell Berry)

O Thou, far off and here, whole and broken,
Who in necessity and in bounty wait,
Whose truth is light and dark, mute though spoken,
By Thy wide grace show me Thy narrow gate.

HUNGER AND THIRST

(an arrangement of a song learned from Sister
Mildred Barker and other members of the Sabbath
Day Lake Shaker community in Maine)

I hunger and thirst,
I hunger and thirst after true righteousness,
In what I've obtained, in what I've obtained,
My soul cannot rest,
An ocean I see, without bottom or shore,
Oh feed me, I'm hungry,
Enrich me, I'm poor,
I will cry unto God,
I never will cease
'til my soul's filled with love,
Love, perfect love and sweet peace.

SHAKE THESE BONES

(Malcolm Dalglish)

I'll show you how I'm feeling, Lord, any day
I'll shake these bones and shout and sing my life away,
I'll shake these bones and shout and sing my life away,
It won't be long before these bones turn to clay.

I'll tell you what I'm thinking, Lord, anytime,
I'll tell you lies, I'll tell you dreams, you won't mind,
I'll tell you lies, I'll tell you dreams,
I know that you won't mind,
There's something there that's out of reach, I will find.

I'll tell you what I'm seeing, Lord, everywhere,
It may be only a small part of what is there,
It may be only a small part of what is really there,
But I'll stumble like the blind man, Lord, without fear.

I'll tell you what I'm hearing, Lord, all the time,
I'm hearing songs and melodies in my mind,
I'm hearing songs and melodies but when they're out of mind,
I'll hear the sweetest peace of all left behind.

I'll show you how I'm living, Lord, every day,
I may not fall down on my knees and start to pray,
I may not fall down on my knees and worship you or pray,
But there's the reverence in my laughter, Lord, anyway.



HOW LONG WATCHMAN

(words and music by Malcolm Dalglish, based on two hymns from South Carolina: "Midnight Cry" and "Ask the Watchman How Long")

When the midnight cry began, Oh what lamentation,
Sirens blared across the land, warning the nation
Now the watchman takes his stand, and the congregation,
Have their hands up in the air, reaching for salvation.

How long, watchman, how long,
He don't know, it is now,

When he's coming here, now,
Ask the leader is it now,
Keep it moving here, now,
Ask the preacher is it now,
Where we going here, now,
Ask the doctor is it now,
Why we stopping here, now,
Ask the teacher is it now,
Who's he talking to, now,
Ask the brother is it now,
What's he saying, here, now,
Ask the sister is it now,
When's he coming, keep moving,
Where we going, why we stopping,
Who's talking,
Ask the people is it now,
What's he saying here, now,
Tell me the hour of the night!

Light burns out the open sky,
Balancing the powers,
All the sentries now are blind,
In the midnight hours,
All the wisemen have gone mad,
Here's the church and steeple,
Open up their brilliant hands
And look for all the people.

How long, watchman, how long ...

Wind sucks through the open door,
Mass evacuation.
There's no more there is no more,
Hands wrapped in devotion.
There is freedom now for all,
All who left so quickly.
Watchman tell me ...

LAY ME LOW

(traditional Shaker hymn, arr. by Malcolm Dalglish)

Lay me low, lay me low, lay me low
Where mother can find me,
Where mother can bless me,
Where mother can own me.

PARADISE

(based on shape-note hymn "Northport"; words
by Malcolm Dalglish)

Dear Lord I wander here below, Glory halleluia,
I sing to you that I may know, Glory halleluia,
Have I a seat in paradise, Glory halleluia,
Is there a love that never dies, Glory halleluia.

I have some friends before me gone,
But I'm resolved to travel on,
I vow that I'll remember them,
Their memory a requiem.

By faith my journey I'll pursue,
Heaven on earth Thy will to do,
You are the flame that lights the way,
In cool of night and heat of day.

I cannot say I have no fear,
Yet I am glad that I am here,
You gave the power to my hand,
My arms embrace this promised land.

I want to live in paradise,
There is a love that never dies,
I want to live in paradise,
There is a love that never dies.