

BOSTON

for 4 - or 6 - part mixed voices, a cappella

WILLIAM BILLINGS

WILLIAM BILLINGS (1746-1800)

Edited by Lawrence Bennett

The early American plain-tune is a simple, four-part musical setting of a metrical text, usually a hymn or psalm. Like most plain-tunes, *Boston* is named for a town in which its composer was active as a singing-master. The author of both text and music, Billings later expanded the poem and set it to new music, publishing it as the piece *Shiloh* in *The Suffolk Harmony* (1786). *Boston* retells the story of the appearance of an angel who announced the Nativity to the shepherds. Singers are encouraged to experiment with a variety of doublings to achieve the best possible balance and sonority. If enough singers are available, the tenor line (the tune) may be doubled an octave above by some sopranos and the soprano line doubled an octave below by a few tenors, creating a rich six-part texture recommended by the singing-masters of Billings' period.* Whatever the distribution or doubling of parts, singers should strive to preserve the sprightly quality of the music.

Nimblely ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 84$)

pp

SOPRANO
and opt.
TENOR

Me - thinks I see a heav'n - ly host Of _

ALTO

pp

Me - thinks I see a heav'n - ly host Of

TUNE

TENOR
and opt.
SOPRANO

pp

Me - thinks I see a heav'n - ly host Of

BASS

pp

Me - thinks I see a heav'n - ly host Of _

Nimblely ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 84$)

pp

for
rehearsal
only

*For plain-tunes, a few singing-masters suggest that the tune be sung by sopranos only and the top part by tenors only.

3

an - gels on the wing; Me - thinks I hear their

an - gels on the wing; Me - thinks I hear their

an - gels on the wing; Me - thinks I hear their

an - gels on the wing; Me - thinks I hear their

3

6

cheer - ful notes, So mer - ri - ly they sing:

cheer - ful notes, So mer - ri - ly they sing:

cheer - ful notes, So mer - ri - ly they sing:

cheer - ful notes, So mer - ri - ly they sing:

6