

ROBERT SIROTA

COMPOSER

PROGRAM NOTES

APPARITIONS (2013)

Program note by Robert Sirota:

Apparitions, for organ and string quartet, was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists and had its official premiere in Boston as part of the AGO's 2014 national convention.

American hymnody has played a significant role in my organ writing for some time. The last organ piece I wrote was for the historic Appleton organ, an 1830 instrument housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It's a rather ghostly instrument, so I imagined that three early American hymns (*Helmsley*, *Semley*, and *From Greenland's Icy Mountains*) had been played on the Appleton so many times that the organ was able to play them by itself, and I went from there. The title of that piece is *holy ghosts*. I was still turning that idea over out in my mind when I learned that the 2014 AGO commission would be performed in King's Chapel, practically the epicenter of 18th and 19th century New England hymnody.

Apparitions emerged as paraphrases on four tunes – not so much variations as jumping-off points for something more flexible and fantastic. I have employed two Southern Harmony tunes: *Jesus Calls Us (Restoration)* and *Wondrous Love*, and two Northern tunes: *My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (Resignation)* and *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing (Nettleton)*, and am in awe of the spiritual and emotional range of these great melodies: the stark simplicity of *Resignation*, the primal power of *Restoration*, the passionate joy of *Nettleton*, and particularly the fierce piety of *Wondrous Love*.