South Highland Songs

About the piece:

The *South Highland Songs* is a set of three poems by Rebecca Wright. They describe her experiences growing up near Portland, OR, isolated and queer, on an abandoned tree farm which her parents uprooted to the detriment of the thriving little ecosystem which had developed there. After decades where the native grasses, wildflowers, and creatures had the place to themselves, everything was stripped to bare earth to make the classic pesticide-treated American lawn with non-native grass, causing a destructive ripple effect affecting the insects, bees, birds, flowers, and animals whom she had come to love so much.

In the *South Highland Songs*, Rebecca draws parallels between the way one considers a geographical place and ecosystem and the way one considers a person, as well as the similarity of the injuries which can be done to both. While harm can never be undone, it can be survived–and from that place of survival, she shares her longing for a better world where people live in loving, honest relationships with themselves, each other, and the natural world.

I set these poems with Rebecca's permission shortly after my first visit to Portland so that the place would be fresh in my mind when coming up with the music. The changing time signatures throughout the piece signify the tension between freedom/whimsy and squareness/rigidity, dancing mostly between 3/4 and 4/4 time respectively. The musical language is ripe with nostalgia, resilience, and healing.

South Highland Songs

I. Ghosts in the ravine

Rebecca Wright (b. 1991) **Kelvyn Koning (b. 1994)**

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13

my sha-dow in the ra vine, my sil - hou-ette on the fo - rest

19

edge, my twelve year old self trans - lu - cent a - mong the

mp

mp

24
ghosts of wild - flowers and bees, be-fore the fo - reign
p
p
30
sod took root be-fore they al - most killed me,

36
mf
there was a time of clo - ver and bee - tles, swal-low-tails and
mf
mf
mf

40
rit.
ro-bins, be - fore we knew the dan ger, the ground and I,
rit.

Decisive ♩ = 150
47
f
be-fore I had to tear my roots up and run un-til I could go no fur ther,
f
Decisive ♩ = 150
f
f
51
close to a gentle "s"
like wind in grass
mp
and leave be-hind the si - lent gra - ss, and the
mf
mf
mf