In the Arms of Morpheus (1986)

In 1985, New Music Concerts commissioned Weinzweig to write seven short a capella works for mixed chorus. This “choral album” ranges widely, from the popular and lighthearted Hockey Night in Canada (1985) to the intense portrayal of a political prisoner in Prisoner of Conscience (1985). In the Arms of Morpheus is evocative of the tranquility of nighttime, just before falling asleep. Though Weinzweig wrote the text himself, he includes the following quotation from Lord Alfred Tennyson’s Song of the Lotus-Eaters in the inside cover: “Music that brings sweet sleep/down from the blissful skies.”

The texture of In the Arms of Morpheus is mostly sparse, as is evidenced in the work’s opening: first the sopranos and altos build a crunch chord step-by-step, sung first at piano, then at pianissimo; the tenors and basses then repeat the same gestures. Weinzweig maintains this texture throughout, avoiding a full tutti until the closing pianissimo chord. The altos receive special attention in this work, as they begin each new line of text before being joined by the tenors. A textless soprano solo punctuates In the Arms of Morpheus and helps create the ethereal imagery of the work: that of succumbing to “weary eyes” and embracing the dream world created by Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams.

Written by Alexa Woloshyn