

## MOON

### COMPOSER'S NOTES

#### THE SONG IN A SENTENCE

*Moon* is an evocation of the barrenness and bleakness of Earth's moon.

#### HISTORY & MAIN POINTS OF THE SONG

The song was originally part of my children's musical *Granny Galactica* written for Yealmpton Youthspring Youth Music Theatre in 1989. The characters in the musical are taken on a wild goose chase across the galaxy by an alien robot with ulterior motives, and the Moon is their first port of call. The original version of the song was very different in character – rather grand and stately. I came up with the jazzy, bluesy version ten years later when I used it as part of my first science oratorio, *Powers of Ten*.

Although I've never learnt sign language, I've always been fascinated by it and persuaded a friend of mine to teach the BSL (British Sign Language) version of *Moon* to the three hundred or so children taking part in the first performances of *Powers of Ten*. Quite late in the day, we decided to not sing the first verse at all, but sign it in silence to the accompaniment. The effect on the audience was electrifying, especially on the second night when we had a whole party of young people with hearing impairment there. I was facing the performers, conducting, but I'm told this party of youngsters suddenly sat up and were enthralled by what they were seeing.

Five years later, two out of the first three performances of my second science oratorio, *Lifetime*, were signed throughout by a professional, Steve Almy, with a visually expressive poetry that deeply moved many audience members. When *Powers* was performed by North Cambridge Family Opera Festival Chorus in Massachusetts in 2007, they also featured some performers signing the lyrics in American Sign Language.

#### STYLISTIC POINTS

At the time of writing, *Moon* has not been performed with the quasi-improvisatory solo line that floats above the repeat. This line can be sung or played by an appropriate instrument such as flute, saxophone or violin. I would be just as happy for this line to be partially- or fully-improvised. If you would like to incorporate a silently-signed verse (to instrumental accompaniment), just add an extra verse at the beginning or between the two iterations. If the pianist has the appropriate skills, he/she would be very welcome to add further jazz-style ornaments, to improvise on the music or to develop their own accompaniment from scratch using the chord symbols.

#### OTHER ACTIVITIES

- You could research and learn the Sign Language version of the lyrics in your own country and incorporate them into your performance. If you put a video of the signed version onto YouTube, we'll certainly consider putting it on SingTV.
- I would love to see a sequence of still images or movie clips from the Apollo Moon
- Program compiled to accompany this song. If you have a go at this, let us know, and we may include it on SingTV.
- Try devising a dance to the song inspired by the low-gravity conditions of the lunar surface.
- Perhaps use the song as a starting-point for a study project about the Moon, covering both scientific and mythological aspects of its role in human life, thinking and history.