

Dr Ian Percy

www.ianpercy.me.uk

Website Context and Research

Acoustic Composition 8

Sixteen to Four (2012) Revised and Rearranged (2026)

Three movements for four mixed voices (SATB)

Sixteen to Four was composed between January and March 2012. It is a relatively consonant, but virtuosic score for four solo voices (SATB).

The commission for this piece called for works set using a selection of Latin liturgical text taken from a specific set of Hymns of Praise, none of which captured the creative energy of the composer. Selected fragments of text were cut into separate lines and rearranged to form passages of alternative narrative. This mainly involved removing blatant dogma and exaggerated worship, but was further informed by personal taste, word patterns and the role of accents. However, it was not intended to subvert the meaning of the words and it is still hoped that the final text has formed into a reverent and respectful setting.

As the idea developed, a proportional symmetry (geometric asymmetry) between the different verses, lines and syllables of the Latin transcription were adopted:

Verses 1 & 2 = 6:5

Verses 2 & 3 = 5:4

Verses 3 & 4 = 4:3

Verses 4 & 5 = 3:2

Verses 5 & 6 = 2:1

Chorus 1 – 4 = 1:1

The piece has a total of 64 different Latin words (plus Amen) with Domine and Dominus counting as one word within the scheme; this gives us the title for the piece: *Sixteen to Four* (16 x 4). All formal units and distribution of text can be referenced to a multiplication or division of the number sixteen (verses, sections, lines and syllables).

2026 Revisions: A note from the composer ...

I am fortunate to be able to state that in my career as a Senior Lecturer in Composition I have had the opportunity to organise and host eight years of vocal workshops and annual campus concerts with varying members of *The Sixteen* vocal ensemble and after each year would enthusiastically plan to start a new piece for a cappella voices. However, it wasn't until the fairly conventional (though modal) setting of the *Kyrie* text in 2017 that I managed to actually complete another vocal work.

The dilemma faced is that the music I like to compose does not translate well to a cappella voices. Each year one could gladly listen to the vocal quartet sing triads and tonal counterpoint all day long and never grow tired of listening, but would instantly grow bored with my developing sections of similarly styled materials once the notes hit score form. Although I have pledged to complete the *Missa Brevis* around that *Kyrie* one day, one fears one may never compose another original contemporary work for solo voices, so ...

Recognising the positives and negatives in this score, one set about making the music more accessible to singers. 2026 revisions has radically altered the pacing and breathing for the material and rearranged the original marathon-like single movement into three shorter tablets of text. A couple of sections have been repeated (with small variations) to help balance the internal form of the tablets. Each of the three songs carries its own musical message, but there are connectives and shared materials left over from the original score, so that the collective still carries a unified whole.

I was close to classing these revisions as recomposition, but apart from the pacing and form, very few chords have actually changed. Notes of chords have been rearranged amongst the parts and more than a handful of notes have been completely adjusted, but almost all of the original music exists, just redistributed and re-paced within new dynamic contours. The time taken to reshape this score has been well spent, as the three short tablets of song would now make an unusual (and not uncomplimentary) contemporary addition to any vocal programme.

The question I do ask myself is should I now rename the work *Sixteen to Four to Three*?

Contact:

For further information and resources contact the composer at: contact@ianpercy.me.uk