Janet Graham

Cradle Song

Some notes on Gordon Hodgeon and Cradle Song

I first met Gordon in 2010 in the Spine Injury Unit at The Hawthorns, Peterlee, where I was working as music therapist. He was unable to move his limbs and often needed a ventilator to help him breathe. In our first session he told me he liked classical music and that he had sung in a choir. We sang a few traditional folk songs together, but this was an effort for him because of his breathing difficulties. As Gordon was not able to access any of the musical instruments, "mainstream" music therapy was not going to be possible, but music was important to him so I decided to offer him weekly sessions and find a way we could work together. We listened to a wide range of music, talking about it afterwards. We also discussed literature, and I read some poems to him from a book a friend had brought as a present, as he was unable to hold it and turn the pages.

As well as being a well-known and highly respected teacher, teacher trainer and schools advisor in the Teesside area Gordon was a published poet himself, and he seemed frustrated and depressed that his physical disabilities made it impossible for him to be creative. I encouraged him to keep composing poetry and offered to act as his amanuensis. He would hold the first drafts of new poems in his memory until I could write them down from dictation. I typed them up at home and printed them off so that they could be placed in front of him for reading and editing. Later, Gordon was equipped with a voice recognition computer programme and I was able to copy the poems from a memory stick onto his laptop so that he could edit and add to them himself.

Although he often became tired, and had several bouts of illness and hospitalisation, Gordon worked at his new poems and put together a new anthology, Still Life, which was launched at The Hawthorns in 2012. Shortly after that he was discharged from The Hawthorns and went to live with one of his daughters and her family. Even after losing the power of s peech he continued composing poetry with the help of carers, using a system of eye-blinking to communicate, letter by letter.

He published two more anthologies of poetry before his death in 2016 at the age of 75. Although most of Gordon's poems seem so complete in themselves that they do not lend themselves to musical setting, at my request he listed several which he thought might be suitable, including Cradle Song. The poem was written on the birth of his grand-daughter Ferne in 2013. My first setting was for unaccompanied choir and there is also an arrangement for soprano, recorder and piano.

Gordon Hodgeon

for Ferne, born November 2013

Cradle Song

earth be your cradle earth be my bed sky be your morning light sky my old head sea be your appetite sea my salt tears days be your life to come days my last years

let us be joined for all the days we share in our familial line who went before who still may come

and when you are grown and I am gone earth be your living room earth my last house

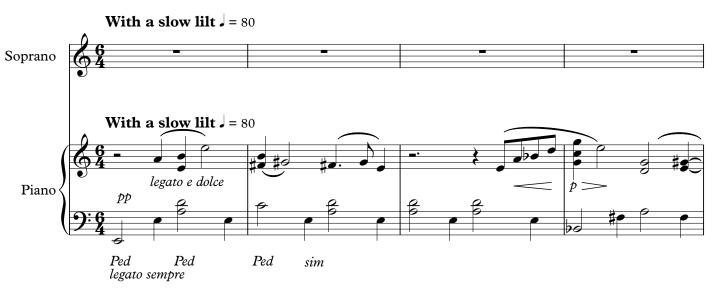
one earth one sky one sea our only place one home

Cradle Song is published in Talking to the Dead, Smokestack Books 2015

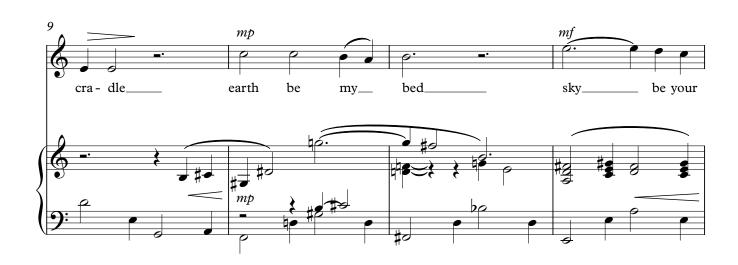
Cradle Song

(Arranged from a setting for unaccompanied choir)

Gordon Hodgeon Janet Graham

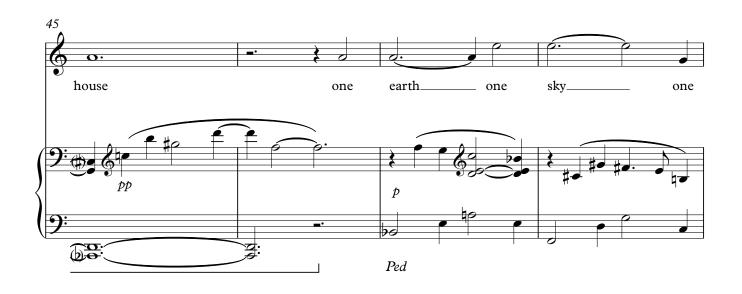


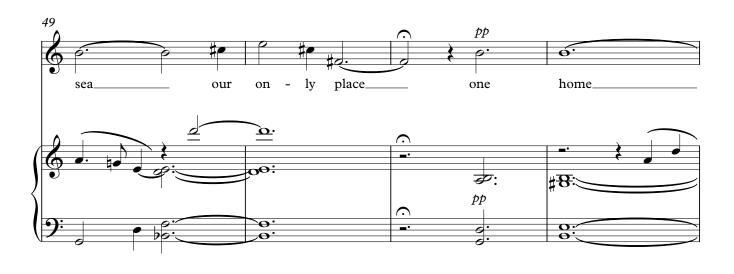


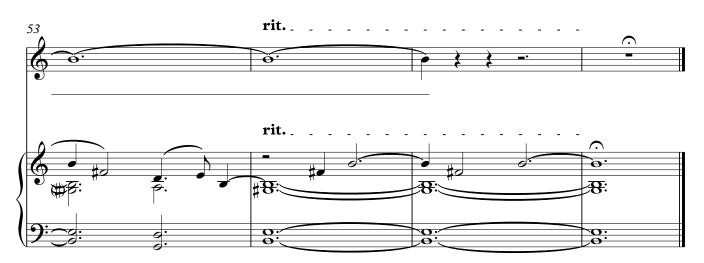












Janet Graham, this arrangement January 2018