

Gwyneth Walker

CLIMBING TO HEAVEN

*A staged work for Readers, Actors and
Chamber Orchestra*

*based on **The Wisdom of the Desert** – translations of the
sayings of the Desert Fathers, by Thomas Merton*

Commissioned by the Chandler Center for the Arts

*premiered by the Montpelier Chamber Orchestra
Catherine Broucek Orr, Music Director
and members of the Randolph community as READERS and MONKS
directed by Charlie McMeekin
Chandler Hall, Randolph, Vermont – June 1, 2003*

Duration: approximately 22 minutes

Program Notes

Climbing to Heaven is a dramatization of sayings of fourth-century Desert Fathers (hermits) as translated by Thomas Merton in *The Wisdom of the Desert*. Merton's writings bring to life these colorful and uniquely-charming monks. Their humor, their simplicity and their imagination create a world worth visiting by contemporary readers and audiences. And thus, this staged work endeavors to make this voyage possible.

The Participants

Two READERS, dignified yet dramatic. The roles of the two READERS are equal. The READERS stand on opposite sides of the stage, and exchange readings in a commentary manner. [Readers wear black concert clothing at the Introduction and Conclusion of the work. They wear monks' habits for the majority of the presentation.]

A group of MONKS as the non-speaking actors to dramatize/pantomime the sayings and stories. The MONKS are divided into older Brothers (such as Abbot Anthony, Abbot Pastor, etc.) and younger Brothers (such as the young monk trying to climb to heaven). It is envisioned that there be at least 6 MONKS. More would be preferable. Since movement is an essential part of the dramatization, the actors should also be dancers. [MONKS may be male or female.] The MONKS move with heads bowed, faces covered by their hoods. Their focus is humility, looking downward, until the end of the drama, when they look up to heaven in prayer.

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA of 12 players [fl, ob, cl, bsn, hn, tpt, perc., vln 1, vln 2, vla, vcl, cb] all seated at rear of stage, except for tpt, off-stage. CONDUCTOR, seated on podium (disguised as monastery pillar) in front of orchestra. [See diagram on following page.]

Instructions

The movements of the MONKS are intended to be synchronized with the music. Many of the stage actions are paralleled by musical gestures. Thus, it is important to follow the instructions provided in the score. These guidelines may be enhanced in the dramatizations. A close interaction between the orchestra and the actors is desired.

CLIMBING TO HEAVEN

1. ALPHA – Introduction “The Hermits”	p. 1
2. THE PATH TO HEAVEN “Gates and Windows” “Climbing and Falling”	8
3. GARMENTS “A Chest of Clothing” “Catch the Wind”	11
4. WORK OF THE HANDS “An Axe” “Ten Lamps of Fire”	14
5. ENVY “The Dwelling” “The Brick”	17
6. LIVING APART “Fly to the Lord” “Sour Grapes”	20
7. PUMMELING THE MUMMIES	21
8. INTERLUDE “The Monks at Work” “In Community, Greeting Each Other”	24
9. OMEGA – Conclusion “Floating to Heaven” “Prayer”	29

STAGE DIAGRAM

