

And when the last of us returns to thee

Choral portion of Section II. Chorus and Bass Solo
from
Hymn to the Earth [1929]

Edward Joseph Collins, music and words

Notes by Jon Becker, editor for the Collins project

Composed in Wisconsin's Door County, *Hymn to the Earth* was inspired by that peninsula's landscape and changing seasons.

This choral work, taken from the final section of Collins's secular cantata *Hymn to the Earth*, is a setting of the composer's own words:

And when the last of us returns to thee,
And life and death have ceased to be,
Thou wilt still roll on through endless space
Amid the vast silence of eternity, patiently awaiting
Who knows? Ah!

The composer takes a quite modern view of human existence, so small within the vastness of the cosmos. The other sections of *Hymn* celebrate the other seasons, as well as the beauty of our planet. Collins also uses the phrase "Mother Earth," perhaps for the first time in Western classical music.

Collins (10 November 1886 – 1 December 1951) thus holds a very interesting place betwixt two legendary Wisconsin environmental thinkers and writers, John Muir (21 April 1838 – 24 December 1914) and Aldo Leopold (11 January 1887 – 21 April 1948), in a Wisconsin cultural and intellectual history that arcs from the pre-historic Native American Effigy Mound Culture (ca. 700-1100 CE) toward the founding of Earth Day by U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson (4 June 1916 – 3 July 2005).

This choral setting of *And when the last of us returns to thee* was extracted from Collins's piano-vocal score for *Hymn to the Earth*.