

JABBERWOCKY

SATB (divisi) choral,
a cappella

Music by **KIRSTEN DUNCAN**

A narrative work for
intermediate choirs, setting
Lewis Carroll's epic adventure
poem 'Jabberwocky'.

Dedicated to the choirs of
Christ Church St Laurence
(Sydney) and The Resonants
(Canberra), Australia.

Item 2023-01
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Duration 3:55 min
AU \$4.00



Jabberwocky: Glossary and pronunciation guide

Word	Pronunciation	Meaning*
brill-ig	as in brilliant; as in igloo	4 o'clock in the afternoon – the time you begin broiling things for dinner
sli-thy	as in sly-thee	Lithe and slimy
toves	rhymes with stoves	Something like badgers, lizards and corkscrews
gyre	hard g as in get; rhymes with fire	To go round and round like a gyroscope
gimble	hard g as in get; rhymes with nimble	To make holes like a gimlet
wabe	rhymes with babe	A grass plot around a sundial
mimsy	rhymes with whimsy	Flimsy and miserable
boro-goves	as in borrow; hard g as in get; rhymes with stoves (note: no r in goves)	A thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all around, something like a live mop
mome	rhymes with home	Short for “from home”, meaning lost
raths	long a as in bar	A sort of green pig
outgrabe	as in grave	Something between bellow and whistle, with a kind of sneeze in the middle
jubjub bird	rhymes with hub	An imaginary bird of a ferocious, desperate and occasionally charitable nature, noted for its excellence when cooked
frumious	as in frugal	So angry or furious as to be fuming
bandersnatch		A fleet, furious, fuming, fabulous creature, of dangerous propensities, immune to bribery and too fast to flee from
vorpal	rhymes with portal	Keen and deadly
manx-ome	rhymes with banks + tome	Fearsome or monstrous
uff-ish	as in puff	Huffish (peevish or sulky)
whiffling		Blowing in puffs or gusts of air
tulgey	rhymes with bulgy (soft g)	Thick, dense and dark
burbled	rhymes with hurdled	To speak in murmurs
snicker-snack		With a snapping or clicking sound
gal-umphing	as in gallop and triumph	To gallop in triumph
beamish		Radiant or shining
frab-jous	rhymes with grab + bus	Fair and joyous; fabulous
calloo, callay	as in callous	
chortled		Chuckled and snorted

* Meaning as explained to Alice by Humpty Dumpty in Chapter 6 of *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll (London, Penguin, 1998 [orig. 1871])

Tearle, O. 2016, 'A short analysis of 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll', <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/01/a-short-analysis-of-jabberwocky-by-lewis-carroll/>

Lim, K. n.d., 'Jabberwocky variations: Carroll's pronunciation guide', <http://www76.pair.com/keithlim/jabberwocky/poem/pronunciation.html>



'The Jabberwock', Illustration by John Tenniel for Chapter I of *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll (London, Penguin, 1998 [orig. 1871]).

Jabberwocky

For mixed a cappella voices (SATB divisi)

Words by LEWIS CARROLL

Music by KIRSTEN DUNCAN

Adagio, molto rubato ♩ = 60

SOPRANO *p* (legato, stagger breathing)
Hmmm

ALTO *p* (legato, stagger breathing)
Hmmm

TENOR

BASS *mf*
'Twas bri-llig, and the sli-thy toves did gyre and gim-ble in the wabe: All

Piano (for rehearsal only)

PREVIEW ONLY

A

Soprano *p* Hmmm *sfz* bri-llig, —

Alto *p* Hmmm *sfz* bri-llig, —

Tenor *mp* 'Twas bri-llig, and the

Bass *mf* mim-sywere the bo-ro-goves, and the mome raths out-grabe. 'Twas bri-llig, and the

Piano

12 **B**

mf

the Ja bber wock, the Ja-bber wock, my son!

mf

the Ja bber-wock, the Ja bber-wock, the Ja bber-wock, my son!

ware the Ja bber-wock, the Ja bber wock, the Ja - bber- wock, my son! The

ware the Ja bber-wock, the Ja - bber- wock, my son! The

PREVIEW ONLY

14 *agitated, non-legato*

mp *mf*

jaws bite, claws catch! Jub-jub Jub-jub Jub jub, fru-mious ban der- snatch!" He

mp *mf*

jaws bite, claws catch! Jub-jub Jub-jub Jub jub, fru-mious ban der snatch!" He

jawsthat bite, the claws that catch! Be - ware the Jub-jub bird, and shunthe fru-mious ban der- snatch!"

jawsthat bite, the claws that catch! Be - ware the Jub-jub bird, and shunthe fru-mious ban der- snatch!"

26

the Ja-bber wock, Ja-bber - wock, Ja-bber-wock, with eyes of flame, of flame, of

the Ja-bber wock, Ja-bber - wock, Ja-bber-wock, with eyes of flame, of flame, of

thought. Ja-bber wock, Ja-bber-wock, with eyes of flame, of flame, of

thought. Ja-bber - wock, Ja-bber-wock, with eyes of flame, of flame, of

PREVIEW ONLY

29

[$\text{♩} = \text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$] *f* *agitated, non-legato* [$\text{♩} = \text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$]

flame, came whiff-ling through the tul-gey wood, and bur-ble as it came.

flame, came whiff-ling through the tul-gey wood, and bur-ble as it came.

flame, came whiff-ling through the tul-gey wood, and bur-ble as it came.

flame, bur - ble, bur - ble, bur - ble, bur - ble, bur - ble, bur - ble as it came.

39 [♩ = ♩] *mp* 7 [♩ = ♩]

la la la la la la la "And

went ga-lumph, ga-lumph, ga-lumph, he went ga-lumph - ing back. "And

went ga-lumph, ga-lumph, ga-lumph, he went ga-lumph - ing back.

went ga-lumph, ga-lumph, ga-lumph, he went ga-lumph - ing back.

PREVIEW ONLY

41 *a little faster, warmly expressive*

has thou slain the Jab-ber-wock? Come to my arms, my beam-ish boy! O frab-jous day! frab-jous day!

has thou slain the Jab-ber-wock? Come to my arms, my beam-ish boy! O frab-jous day! frab-jous day!

p Shoooh ooh O frab - jous, frab - jous,

p Shoooh ooh O frab - jous, frab - jous,

a little faster

has thou slain the Jab-ber-wock? Come to my arms, my beam-ish boy! O frab-jous day! frab-jous day!

50 **G** **Grave** (*slowly and deliberately*, ♩ = 50)

mp

"Twas bri-l lig, and the sli - thy toves did gyre and gim-ble in the wabe: All

mp

"Twas bri-l lig, and the sli - thy toves did gyre and gim-ble in the wabe: All

mp

"Twas bri-l lig, and the sli - thy toves did gyre and gim-ble in the wabe: All

mp

"Twas bri-l lig, and the sli - thy toves did gyre and gim-ble in the wabe: All

(*slowly* ♩ = 50)

PREVIEW ONLY

53 **rit.**

mim - sy were the bo-ro - goves, and the mome raths out - grabe.

mim - sy were the bo-ro - goves, and the mome raths out - grabe.

mim - sy were the bo-ro - goves, and the mome raths out - grabe.

mim - sy were the bo-ro - goves, and the mome raths out - grabe.

rit.

Jabberwocky (2023)

This choral work by Kirsten Duncan started life as a memory of a parody of an Anglican, or 'English', chant sung at a choir party many years earlier. However, fellow choristers could neither confirm nor deny such a rendition, so perhaps it was merely imagined! Undeterred, Kirsten set Lewis Carroll's poem to the remembered/imagined chant, and that first draft is still largely intact as the final stanza of this work, also recommended as the starting point for learning the piece.

Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', published in Chapter 1 of his 1871 novel *Through the Looking-Glass*, sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, is itself somewhat a parody of the 'hero overcoming a monster' plot trope epitomised by the epic Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. A "beamish boy" sets out on an adventure through a mysterious land populated by fantastical creatures, vanquishes a fearsome beast and returns triumphantly home. Central to the enduring appeal of the tale is Carroll's linguistic creativity, as Humpty Dumpty explains to Alice, blending common words "like a portmanteau ... two meanings packed up into one word", for example, "slithy" means "lithe and slimy". (Tearle 2016)

There are at least 16 other choral settings of 'Jabberwocky', so why choose this one? Like most, Kirsten's composition seeks to express the meanings of the words and actions in the text through musical ideas. Unlike most, this piece, composed for intermediate to advanced mixed adult choirs (SATB divisi) without any instrumental accompaniment (a piano reduction is included for rehearsal), combines the tradition of Anglican chant with a mood of fireside storytelling for a ripping musical yarn of high adventure.

Kirsten Duncan

Kirsten has had a lifelong passion for choral singing. Her first memorable event was a combined primary schools performance of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* at the Sydney Opera House where she also played in a recorder ensemble. As an early teen, she donned medieval costume for Judith Clingan's Canberra youth choir Gaudeamus's tour of New Zealand that included a spontaneous double-choir performance in a glowworm cave. With the Hamburg International School (ISH) choir Kirsten performed in Frankfurt, Vienna, London and Bonn and also sang in the auditioned semi-professional ensemble ISH Singers. Kirsten honed her sightsinging skills and sacred repertoire during three years of evensong and festival services with the choirs of Christ Church St Laurence, which, according to Geoffrey Moorhouse in *Sydney: the story of a city* (1999), 'may well be the finest choir in the entire Anglican Communion', under the direction of Dr Neil McEwan.

Returning to Canberra in 2002, Kirsten auditioned for The Resonants, directed by Helen Swan, after hearing the choir on ArtSound FM radio. She has now been singing with the award-winning group for two thirds of its 30+ year history, including recording two albums and performing in dozens of the choir's own concerts plus collaborations with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, the Canberra International Music Festival, The Idea of North and others. She has been an active member of The Resonants committee and designer of the choir's promotional material for most of that time.

Kirsten feels privileged to now be writing choral music, contributing to the community that has been a stabilising thread through a life spanning many cities, military service, graphic design, climate activism and more. She dedicates it as a gift to every singer that she has entwined voices with. She especially thanks Helen Swan and The Resonants for giving voice to this composition and providing feedback through its development.

Wikipedia, 'Anglican chant', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_chant

Tearle, O. 2016, 'A short analysis of 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll', <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/01/a-short-analysis-of-jabberwocky-by-lewis-carroll/>

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