

The Cross of Snow by *Ethan Rey Gonzalez Soledad*

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"The Cross of Snow" is an original choral composition based on a poem of the same name by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow was an internationally renowned American poet in his lifetime. The poem was written eighteen years after the death of his wife whose dress accidentally caught on fire. He unsuccessfully attempted to extinguish the flames with his own body. The first part of the poem describes his sleepless nights where the image of a dead loved one's face stares at him from a wall. Longfellow's mention of martyrdom and its inability to lead fire to its "repose" references his futile attempts to extinguish the flames that engulfed his wife with his own body. His failed attempts to save his wife is then contrasted with the unimaginably blessed story that was his wife's life. The final lines of the poem then invoke the title as a metaphor for carrying the guilt from her death and the loss of the ability to see beauty in the world. Through the use of text painting, I portray the haunting guilt that comes with the loss of a spouse, but also the love and joy that comes with celebrating their life. Repetition of the line "long dead" emphasizes this lingering guilt that is brought to a musical climax as he remembers his failed attempt to save her. The lines which recall her life are portrayed by a soaring lyrical melody and dense harmonic texture. The piece ends the same way it began to show that the emotional wounds from his spouse's death never truly healed. The combination of the contemporary American choral style with the text of an iconic American poet makes work a significant contribution to the contemporary American choral repertoire.