

# WHEN DAVID HEARD

Jennifer Fowler

for chamber choir (divided into 4 groups), and piano (or alternative instrument or voice)

Duration: c. 9 mins

*Echoes music*

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## NOTES for "**WHEN DAVID HEARD**"

by Jennifer Fowler

"When David Heard" is the setting of a dramatic account of the death of Absalom. It contains a universal theme: the rebellion of a child against his parent. Everyone, whether child or parent, will recognise the potent mixture love, frustration and guilt engendered in this relationship. David is forced to fight, in order to retain his kingship, but he is overcome by guilt, as well as grief, when his son is killed in the battle.

Musically, I was thinking in terms of a kind of chanting, and here I found it useful to think of Aboriginal chant, rather than that of the European tradition. From Aboriginal chant, I have borrowed the idea of a phrase pattern which typically starts high and loud and finishes low and soft. It is also slightly out of synchronisation in pitch and rhythm. Having established this pattern I have then found it useful to break out of it at certain dramatic points. Rather more of the story is told in this version, than in the famous Thomas Tomkins motet of the same name; but the piece ends with the same text as Tomkins and contains a couple of brief musical references to it.

"When David Heard" was written in 1982 and revised in 2007. It was originally commissioned by the Australia Council for the Collegium Musicum of the University of Western Australia.

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## WHEN DAVID HEARD

Jennifer Fowler

Original version, 1983, commissioned by the Music Board of the Australia Council. Revised version, 2007.

### NOTES:

The choir is divided into 4 groups:

**Group 1:** SATB. Only a few voices on each part. When not involved in any activity in Group 1 these singers can join other groups.

The sound pulses, progressing between open mouth and nearly-shut mouth.

**Group 2:** S + A. A single-line mixture of S and A voices. (more sops than altos).

**Group 3:** S + A; T + B. A single-line mixture of S and A voices, reproduced at the octave with mixed T and B voices.

**Group 4:** T + B. A single-line mixture of T and B voices.

### ACCOMPANIMENT

Several alternatives are possible. Only one of these alternatives should be used. (Note: this is not really an accompaniment, so much as a ritualistic interjection between the choir phrases).

1. Keyboard. Preferred option is the piano, but could be organ or marimba.
2. Treble instrument. Preferred options are: oboe, violin, viola, or trumpet, but a different instrument could be used.
3. A solo soprano or tenor (can be a member of Group 1). In this case, a tuning fork could be used by the soloist, as an accurate new level of pitch is needed. The choir phrases mostly descend, so there will be a tendency to go flat. The interjections provide a way to adjust this.

## TEXT

### 2 Samuel 17 (adapted from the New English Bible)

1. David stood beside the gate, and the army marched past him in units of a thousand and a hundred.

And the king gave orders to Joab, Abishai and Itai: "Deal gently with the young man Absalom, for my sake".

2. The whole army heard the king giving all his officers this order to spare Absalom.

3. David's army took the field against the Israelites and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephron.

The Israelites were routed before the onslaught of David's men; so great was the rout that twenty thousand men fell that day.

4. Absalom was seen by some of David's men as he was riding a mule beneath an oak.

His head was caught in the boughs; he found himself in mid-air and the mule went from under him.

5. One man who saw it told Joab: "I saw Absalom hanging from an oak. I would not lift a finger against the king's son. I would not take a thousand pieces of silver to harm the king's son.

For we heard the king say we must take care of him".

6. Joab picked up three stout sticks and drove them against Absalom's chest while he was held fast in the tree and still alive.

Then Joab's armour-bearers closed in on Absalom, struck at him and killed him.

7. Joab sounded the trumpet, and the army came back from the pursuit of Israel.

They took Absalom's body and flung it into a great pit in the forest. The Israelites all fled away.

8. A Cushite was told to go and report to the king what he had seen, but Ahimaaz ran after him and outstripped him.

David was watching at the gate.

9. Ahimaaz called out to the king: "All is well! Blessed be the Lord your God who has given into your hands the men who rebelled against you".

The king asked: "Is all well with the young man Absalom?"

10. Then the Cushite came in and said: "Good news, your majesty! The Lord has avenged you this day on all who rebelled against you".

The king asked: "Is all well with the young man Absalom?"

11. The Cushite answered: "May all the king's enemies and all rebels who would do you harm, be as that young man is. For the Lord has avenged you this day on all those who rebelled against you".

12. When David heard that Absalom was slain, he went up to the chamber over the gate. And as he went he wept and cried out:

"O Absalom, my son; my son Absalom.

Would God I had died for thee.

O Absalom, my son, my son".

# When David Heard . . .

Jennifer Fowler

*mp* *p*

*mp* *p*

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*f* *p*

*fp* *fp*

*fp*

♩ = 120

♩ = 120

S  
A

Group 1

T  
B

Group 2  
S + A

S + A

Group 3

T + B

Group 4  
T + B

Keyboard

Other  
Instrument  
(alternative  
to Keyboard)

Voice  
(alternative  
to Keyboard)

Da - - - - - vid

Da vid stood be - side the gate and the ar - my marched past him in un - its

Da - vid stood be - side the gate and the king gave

Da - vid stood be - side the gate and the king gave

Da - vid gave or - ders, -

King - ng

4 *mp* *p*

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2  
of a thou - sand and a hund - red... *mp* The king gave

SA3  
ord - ers, Deal gent - ly with the young man *mp* Ab - so - lom.

TB3  
ord - ers, Deal gent - ly with the young man *mp* Ab - so - lom.

TB4  
Deal gent - ly with Ab - so - lom



7

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2  
or - ders Deal gent - ly with Ab - so - lom.

SA3  
*mp* Gave or - ders to Jo - ab, Ab - ish - ai and It - ai Deal gent - ly with Ab - so - lom - mm... *p*

TB3

TB4  
*mp* Deal gent - ly with Ab - so - lom for my sake... *p*

11

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

Kbd

Inst

Voc

*mp* *p*

*mf* *mp*

*f* *mp* *p*

*f* *mp* *p*

3

spare

The whole ar-my heard the king give his of-fic-ers this or-der

The whole ar-my heard the king give this or-der to spare Ab-so-lom...

The whole ar-my heard the king give this or-der to spare Ab-so-lom...

The whole ar-my heard this or-der: Spare Ab-so-

Da-vid

16 *mp* *mp*

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2 *mp* *p* *mf*  
The ar - my heard the king give his off - ic - ers this or - der... Da - vid's ar - my took

SA3 *mp* *p* *mf*  
The ar - my heard the or - der: Spare Aa - so lom. Da - vid's ar - my took the field

TB3 *mf*  
Da - vid's ar - my took the field

TB4 *mp* *p* *mf*  
lom The king gave this or - der. Da - vid's ar -

Kbd *mf* *p*

Inst *mf* *p*

Voc *mf* *p*  
ar - my

Preview File Only



21

S1  
A1 *p*  
vid \_\_\_\_\_

T1  
B1

SA2 *mp*  
the field a - gainst the Is - rael - ites and the bat - tle was fought in the for - est of Eph -

SA3 *mp*  
a - gainst the Is - rael - ites, and the Is - rael - ites were rout - ed be -

TB3 *mp*  
a - gainst the Is - rael - ites, and the Is - rael - ites were rout - ed be -

TB4 *mp*  
my rout - ed the Is - rael - ites.



24

S1  
A1

T1  
B1 *p* *pp* *p* *pp*  
men - nn - - en - - nn -

SA2 *mp* *p*  
ron. So great was the rout that ma - ny men fell that day.

SA3 *mp* *p*  
fore the on - slaught of Da - vid's men. So great was the rout that twen - ty thou - sand men fell.

TB3 *p*  
fore the on - slaught of Da - vid's men.

TB4 *mp* *p*  
Such was the rout Twen - ty thous - and men fell

29

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

*p*

en

SA2

*mf*

Ab - sol - om was seen by Da - vid's men as he rode a mule be -

SA3

*mf*

Ab - sol - om was seen by some of Da - vid's men as he was rid - ing a mule be - neath an

TB3

*mf*

Ab - sol - om was seen by some of Da - vid's men as he was rid - ing a mule be - neath an

TB4

*mf*

Ab - so - lom was seen as he rode be -

Kbd

*f* *p*

Inst

*f* *p*

Voc

*f* *p*

Ab - so - lom

Preview File Only

33

S1  
A1

*p* *pp* *p* *pp*

oak

T1  
B1

SA2

*mp* *mp* *p* *mp*

neath an oak... His head was caught in the boughs as his mule went from un-der him. One

SA3

*mp* *mp* *p* *mp*

oak... His head was caught in the boughs as he hung in mid - air. One

TB3

*mp*

oak...

TB4

*mp* *mp* *p*

neath an oak. His head was caught in the boughs.

Kbd

*mf*

Inst

*mf* *p*

Voc

*mf* *p*

One

Preview File Only

38

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

*mp* *p*

Ab - - - - - so

SA2

3 *mf*

man who saw it told Jo - ab... I would not take a thou - sand pie - ces of sil - ver to

SA3

*mf*

man saw... it... I saw Ab - so - lom hang from an oak, but

TB3

*mf*

I saw Ab so - lom hang from an oak, but

TB4

*mf*

saw Ab - sol - lom hang - ing

41

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

*mp* *p*

lom - mm

SA2

*mp* *mp* *p*

harm the king's son... I would not dare lift a fin - ger a - gainst... him.

SA3

*mp* *mp* *p*

I would not dare harm the king's son. For we heard the king say: Take care of him.

TB3

*mp*

I would not dare harm the king's son.

TB4

*mp* *mp* *p*

from an oak... tree, I would not harm the king's...

45

S1  
A1

*mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Jo - - - - ab

T1  
B1

SA2

*mf* *f*

Jo-ab picked up three sticks and drove them a- gainst Ab so-lom's chest while he was held fast...

SA3

*mf* *f*

Jo-ab picked up three sticks and drove them a - gainst his chest

TB3

*mf* *f*

Jo -ab picked up three sticks and drove them a -gainst his chest

TB4

*mf* *f*

son. Jo - ab picked up three sticks and drove them in his chest while

Kbd

*mf*

Inst

*mf*

Voc

*mf*

Jo - ab

50

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

Kbd

Inst

Voc

*mp* *p*

him - - mm

*mf*

Jo - ab's men struck at him while he was still a - live.

*mf*

while he was held. They struck at him while still a - live.

while he was held.

*mf* *p*

he was still a - live. They struck at him and killed him - mm.

55

S1  
A1 *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
Jo - - ab

T1  
B1 *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
Jo - - - - ab

SA2 *mf*  
Jo-ab sound-ed the trump-et, and the ar-my came back from pur-su-ing Is-ra-el.

SA3 *mf*  
Jo-ab sound-ed the trump-et, and they came back from the pur-suit of Is-ra

TB3 *mf*  
Jo-ab sound-ed the trump-et, and they came back from the pur-suit of Is-ra

TB4 *mf*  
They came back from pur-su-ing Is-ra-el.

Kbd *mf*

Inst *mf* *mp*

Voc *mf* *mp*  
sound - ed

59

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

*mp* *p* *mp* *p*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

They took Ab - sol - om's bo - dy and flung it in - to a great

el. They took Ab - sol - om's bo - dy and flung it in - to a great pit in the

el. They took Ab - sol - om's bo - dy and flung it in - to a great pit in the

They flung his bo - dy in - to a

63

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

*mp* *p* *mp* *p*

*p* *mp* *p*

*p* *p*

*p* *p*

pit

pit in the for - est. The Is - ra - lites all fled

for - est. The Is - ra - lites all fled a - way.

for - est.

great pit.



68

S1  
A1 *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
Ah

T1  
B1 *mp* *p* *mp*  
Ah - i - mm - maaz

SA2 *mf* *mp*  
A Cussh-ite was told to go and re - port to the king what he had

SA3 *mf* *mp*  
A Cush - ite was told to re - port to the king but Ah-i - maaz ran af - ter him

TB3 *mf* *mp*  
A Cush - ite was told to re - port to the king but Ah-i - maaz ran af - ter him

TB4 *mp*  
Ah - i - maaz ran af - ter and out - stripped him.

Kbd *mf*

Inst *mf*

Voc *mf*  
Ah

72

S1  
A1 *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
Da - vid

T1  
B1 *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
All

SA2 *mp* *mf*  
seen. Da-vid was watch-ing a-lone at the gate. Ah-i-maaz called out to the

SA3 *mp* *p* *mf*  
— and out- stripped him. Da-vid was watch- ing at the gate. Ah-i-maaz called out to the

TB3  
— and out- stripped him.

TB4 *mp* *p* *mf*  
— Da - vid was watch ing. called out.

Kbd *mf*

Inst *mf*

Voc *mf*  
Ah-i-maaz called

77

S1 A1 *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mp* *p*  
all is well

T1 B1 *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *p* *mp*  
is well

SA2 *ff* *f* *3*  
king All is well! Bless-ed be the Lord your God who has giv-en in-to your hands the

SA3 *ff* *f*  
king All is well! Bless-ed be the Lord your God who has giv-en to you the

TB3 *ff* *f*  
All is well! Bless-ed be the Lord your God who has giv-en to you the

TB4 *ff* *f*  
All is well! Blest be the Lord, who has giv-en

82

S1 A1

T1 B1 *p* *mp* *p*

SA2 *mf* *mp* *3*  
men who re-belled a - gainst you. Is all well with the young man Ab - so - lom?

SA3 *mf* *mp* *3*  
men who re-belled a - gainst you. The king asked: Is all well with the young man Ab - so - lom?

TB3 *mf* *mp*  
men who re-belled a - gainst you. The king asked:

TB4 *mf*  
you your en - e - mies.

86

S1  
A1 *mp* > *p* < *mp* > *p* < *mp* > *p* *mf* > *mp* < *mf* > *mp* < > *mp*  
Ab - so - lom Good news

T1  
B1 *mp* > *p* < *mp* > *p* < *mp* > *mp* < *mf* > > >  
Ab - - - so - lom - mm om

SA2 *mf* *ff* *f*  
Then the Cush - ite came in and said: Good news, your Maj - est - y: The Lord has a - venged

SA3 *mf* *ff* *f*  
Then the Cush - ite came in and said: Good news, your Maj - est - y: The Lord has a - venged

TB3 *mf* *ff* *f*  
Then the Cush - ite came in and said: Good news, your Maj - est - y: The Lord has a - venged

TB4 *ff* *f*  
Good news, your Maj - est - y: The Lord has re -

Kbd *mp*

Inst *mp*

Voc *mp*  
came

Preview File Only

92

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2  
SA3  
TB3  
TB4

Kbd

Inst

Voc

*mf* *mp* *mp* *mf*

— you this day on all who re - belled a - gainst you Is all well with the young man Ab - so - lom?

you on all who re - belled. The king asked: Is all well with the young man Ab - so - lom?

you on all who re - belled.

venged you this day \_\_\_\_\_

97

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

Kbd

Inst

Voc

*mp* *mp* *p* *mp*

*p* *mp* *p* *mp*

*f* *f* *f*

*f* *f* *f*

*f* *f* *f*

*mf* *f*

*mf* *f*

*mf* *f*

Ab - - - so - - - lom - - -

Ab - - - so - - - lom - - -

May all the king's en - em - ies and all re - bels who would do you harm.

May all the king's en - em - ies be as that young man is.

May all the king's en - em - ies be as that young man is.

May all the king's en - em - ies be as that

May all en - e - mies

101

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

Kbd

Inst

Voc

*p* *mm*

*mf* *3* *mp*

-be as that man is... For the Lord has a - venged you on those who re - belled a - gainst you.

*mf* *3* *mp*

For the Lord has a - venged you this day on those who re - belled.

*mf* *mp*

man is... The Lord has a - venged you.

*mf* *f*

*mf* *f*

*mf* *f*

*mf* *f*

When Da -

Slightly Slower (♩ = 108)

106

S1 A1 *mf* *mf* *mp* *p*  
Ab - - so - - lom

T1 B1

SA2 *f* *mf*  
When Da - vid heard that Ab - so - lom was slain, he went up to the cham - ber

SA3 *f* *mf*  
When Da - vid heard that Ab - so - lom was slain, he went up to the

TB3 *f* *mf*  
When Da - vid heard that Ab - so - lom was slain, he went up to the

TB4 *f* *mf*  
When Da - vid heard that Ab - so - lom was slain, he went up to the

Voc *Slightly Slower* (♩ = 108)  
vid



110

S1 A1

T1 B1 *p* *mp* *p*  
And wept

SA2 *mf* *mp*  
And as he went he wept and cried out

SA3 *mp* *mf* *mp*  
cham - ber As he went he wept and cried out;

TB3 *mp*  
cham - ber

TB4 *mp* *mp*  
cham - ber ov - er the gate and cried



114

S1  
A1 *mp* *p* *mp* *p*  
my son

T1  
B1

SA2 *mf* *f*  
Ab - so - lom my son, O my son, O my son,

SA3 *mf* *f*  
O Ab - so - lom my son, O my son, O

TB3 *mf*  
O Ab - so - lom my son, O my son,

TB4 *mf*  
out: O Ab - so - lom my son, my son, O my son

Kbd *mf* *mp*

Inst *mf* *mp*

Voc *mf*  
O my son

119

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2  
Ab - so-lom my son, O my son. Ab - so-lom O my son my son

SA3  
Ab - so-lom my son O Ab - so-lom my son

TB3

TB4  
Ab - so-lom my son O my son, my son

Kbd

Inst

Voc

125 *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

S1  
A1 Ab - - so - - lom

T1  
B1 Ab - - -

SA2 *mf* *mp*  
O my son O Ab-so- lom my son O Ab-so-lom my

SA3 *mf* *mp* *mp*  
O Ab - so-lom my son, O my son my son O Ab - so-

TB3 *mf* *mp*  
O Ab - so-lom my son, O my son my son

TB4 *mf* *mp* *mp*  
O my son, O my son O

Kbd *mf* *mp*

Inst *mf* *mp*

Voc *mf* *mp*  
O my son

131

S1  
A1

T1  
B1  
- so - lom

SA2  
son O my son. Would God I had died for thee

SA3  
lom my son Would God I had died for

TB3  
Would God I had died for

TB4  
my son, my son. Would God I had died for

Kbd  
mf mp

Inst  
mf mp

Voc  
mf mp  
Ab - so-lom

*Preview File Only*

137

S1  
A1  
T1  
B1  
SA2  
SA3  
TB3  
TB4  
Kbd  
Inst  
Voc

*mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Ab - so - lom my son

*mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

Ab - so - lom my son

*p* *mf* *mf*

Ab - so - lom, my son! Ab - so - lom, my

*p* *mf* *mf*

thee Ab - so - lom, my son! Ab - so - lom, my

*p* *mf* *mf*

thee Ab - so - lom, my son! Ab - so - lom, my

*p* *mf* *mf*

thee Ab - so - lom, my son! Ab - so - lom, my

*mp*

*mp*



151

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

*mp* *p* *mp* *mp* *mp*

so - lom mm

my son. Ab - so - lom my son.

my son. Ab - so - lom my son.

my son. Ab - so - lom my son.

my son. Ab - so - lom my son.



156

S1  
A1

T1  
B1

SA2

SA3

TB3

TB4

*p* *pp* *p* *pp*

om - mm - om - mm

om - mm - om - mm - om - mm - om - mm

Ab - so - lom - mm my son - nn - nn

Ab - so - lom - mm