

ROBERT FREDERICK JONES

LA TERRA PROMESSA
(2010)

for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor
and baritone soloists,
mixed chorus and orchestra

Music © 2010 Robert Frederick Jones (SOCAN); lyrics of No. 1, “The World,” from *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine* (2000), by permission of The Literary Estate of Kathleen Raine; lyrics of No. 4, “The Life of the Trees,” from *Hundreds and Thousands: The journals of Emily Carr* (1966), by permission of Irwin Publishing Inc., Richmond Hill, ON; all other lyrics in public domain, selected and edited by the composer.

for Pamela

For double the vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me:
With my inward eye 'tis an old man grey;
With my outward a thistle across my way.

William Blake

*Pensa, lettore; s'io mi maravigliava,
quando vedea la cosa in sè star queta,
e ne l'idolo suo si trasmutava.*

[Think, reader, if I marveled
when I saw the thing still in itself
and in its image changing.]

Dante, *Purgatorio* XXXI.125-27

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ORCHESTRA

3 flutes (2nd also piccolo; 3rd also alto flute)
2 oboes (2nd also cor anglais)
3 clarinets in B \flat and A (3rd also bass clarinet in B \flat)
2 bassoons

only in movement 8:

Alto saxophone
Tenor saxophone
Baritone saxophone

4 horns in F
3 trumpets in C
3 trombones
tuba

timpani and percussion (5 players):

4 timpani, glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, chimes, snare drum, bongos, 8 tom toms, bass drum, triangle, 3 suspended cymbals, sizzle cymbal, chinese cymbal, tam tam, maraca (high), gourd rattle (medium), nutshell rattle, dried reed maraca, pod rattle, ratchet, tambourine, jingles (tiny brass bells), 2 small cowbells, 4 wood blocks, 5 temple blocks, castanets, claves, bamboo chimes, 3 wooden slats, vibraslap, 4 rainsticks, almglocken (in the distance)

harp
piano

first and second violins
violas
violoncelli
contrabassi

COMPOSER'S NOTE

La Terra Promessa is a twelve-movement symphony for soloists, chorus, and orchestra presenting a series of musical visions based on texts and landscapes of heightened significance to me.¹ Texts in Sanskrit, Latin, Chinese, Italian, French, and English are used to evoke images of our world and the world beyond, and of outer and inner states of being. In the overall plan of the work we are carried up the “chain of being” from the formless void before creation, through inanimate nature (the tectonic and meteorological forces that shape the landscape of the planet), the life of the plants, of the animals, leading to the human condition, and ending with an ascent beyond the material world to the divine. Though on the surface the piece may appear to be about rocks and plants and animals and people, at a deeper level it is about the divine energy that permeates all these creations.

The entire work is dedicated to my wife Pamela; individual movements are dedicated to persons who have been of special significance in my life.

1. The World (*for Nadia Turbide*). The first movement is a prelude, setting a short poem by the British poet Kathleen Raine (1908-2003). We see our world at the dawn of time as a mysterious, shimmering, nebulous globe.

It burns in the void,
Nothing upholds it.
Still it travels.

Travelling the void
Upheld by burning
Nothing is still.

Burning it travels.
The void upholds it.
Still it is nothing.

Nothing it travels
A burning void
Upheld by stillness.

2. Tsé Bit'a'í (geological adagio for orchestra) (*in memory of my parents*). In the four-corners region of the United States, the land adjoining the intersection of Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico, geology appears in naked form. Stunningly beautiful landscapes have been produced by a host of geological and meteorological forces. Tsé Bit'a'í (Navajo for “rock with wings”; in English it is known as “Ship Rock”) is a particularly striking geological feature of the region. It is a massive volcanic rock formation rising to a jagged peak nearly 550 metres above the desert floor. It can be seen for miles in all directions because it is the only sizeable object in a vast desert flatland. The rock is sacred to the Navajo people. I have used this structure, of both geological and mythological significance, as an icon of the forces that have shaped our planet.

3. Monde souterrain (The World Below) (*for S.L. & P.McC.*). From the inanimate world of the rocks and the mountains we pass below the zero line to the less than living world of the dead, a negative vision drawn from the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I would like to thank my colleague Isabelle Der Aprahamian for her assistance with the French text for the movement.

Dans la nuit, j'ai rêvé d'un rêve, mon ami. Les cieux gémissaient, la terre répondait. Et j'ai vu un jeune homme, son visage pareil à l'oiseau noir de la tem-pête.

In the night I dreamed a dream, my friend. The heavens moaned, the earth responded. And I saw a young man, his face like the black bird of the storm.

Il me saisit avec les serres d'un aigle, Il me vainquit, me cloua de ses griffes, Il encercla mon corps dans un étau jusqu'à ce que j'abdique; Il me transforma ensuite : mes bras devinrent comme les plumes d'un oiseau.

He seized me with his eagle talons, he overpowered me, pinioned me with his claw, he encircled my body in a clamp till I smothered; then he transformed me—my arms became feathered like a bird.

Il m'entraîna, au palais d'Irkalla, demeure de la Reine des Ténèbres, la maison d'où ceux qui entrent ne sortent pas sur le chemin sans retour ...

He led me away, to the palace of Irkalla, the home of the Queen of Darkness, to the house where those who enter do not come out, on the road from which there is no way back ...

... Vers la maison où les morts s'enlisent dans les ténèbres, Où ils boivent la poussière et mangent l'argile, où, comme les oiseaux, ils sont vêtus de plumes, Ils ne voient aucune lumière ; ils s'enlisent dans la noir-cœur.

... to the house where the dead dwell in darkness, where they drink dirt and eat clay, where, like birds, they are clothed with feathers; they see no light, they dwell in the dark.

e ... venia sì lunga tratta
di gente, ch'io non avrei creduto
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta.

and ... there came so long a train of people that I should never have believed death had undone so many. [Dante, Inferno III.55-57]

4. The Life of the Trees (*for Tamara Vickerd*). We pass now to the world of plant life. In this movement, for soprano solo and piano, I have set a passage from the diaries of the Canadian painter Emily Carr (1871-1945). She enters into the life of the trees and identifies with the forces that propel their growth.

Enter into the life of the trees. Know your relationship and understand their language, unspoken, unwritten talk. Answer back to them in their own dumb magnificence, soul words, earth words, the God in you responding to the God in them. Let the unspoken words remain unspoken, but the secret, internal yearnings, wonderings, seekings, findings—in them is the communion of the myriad voice of God shouting in one great voice, “I am one God. In all the universe there is no other but me. I fill all space. I am all time. I am heaven. I am earth. I am all in all.”

Listen, this perhaps is the way to find that thing that I long for: go into the woods alone and look at the earth crowded with growth, new and old bursting from their strong roots hidden in the silent, live ground, each seed expanding, bursting, pushing its way upward towards the light and air, each one knowing what to do, each one demanding its own rights on the earth. Feel this growth, the surging upward, this expansion, the pulsing life, all working with the same idea, the same urge to express the God in themselves—life, life, life, which is God, for without Him there is no life.

So, artist, you too from the depths of your soul, down among dark and silence, let your roots creep forth, gaining strength. Drive them in deep, take firm hold of the beloved Earth Mother. Push, push towards the light. Draw deeply from the good nourishment of the earth but rise into the glory of the light and air and sunshine. Rejoice in your own soil. Fill it with glory—be glad.

¹ There are two reasons that the title of the work, *La Terra Promessa—The Promised Land*—is in Italian. First, as homage to the *Terra Promessa* poems of the twentieth-century Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, in which “the promised land of Virgil”—the Hesperian land of Italy that is the goal of Aeneas’s quest—“fuses with the promised land of the Bible and with the terminus of all desire.” Secondly, the Italian word *terra* (like the French *terre*) carries a wider range of connotations than the English word *land*, encompassing the concepts of *ground* (the soil), *region*, and *earth* (our home planet).

5. Olympic Rainforest (for Ron Headland). This orchestral scherzo develops energetic musical ideas from the previous vocal movement. The music depicts the primordial teeming energy that is the source of the forest's growth. Although I have never visited the British Columbian rainforests that were so important an inspiration to Emily Carr, this movement recalls time I spent on a family vacation in the rainforest of Olympic National Park near Forks, Washington (we were blissfully unaware of the vampires and werewolves that have subsequently brought attention to the region).

6. The Lamb (for Jean Sult) and **7. The Tyger** (for Andrew Jones). The next two movements present contrasting visions of the animal world in poems by William Blake (1757-1827). **The Lamb** (a setting for a *capella* chorus of a poem from the childlike *Songs of Innocence*) depicts the gentlest of animals while **The Tyger** (from the *Songs of Experience*) depicts the opposite side of nature, "red in tooth and claw."

6. The Lamb

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, & bid thee feed
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, & he is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

7. The Tyger

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

8. Desecration (for Bryan Highbloom). At last humanity makes an appearance, doing what we do so well—making a mess of the world. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah warns of the consequences of unmindful lifestyle.

The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the sky languishes together with the earth; the earth is defiled by the feet of its inhabit-ants; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer the penalty; therefore its inhabitants are desolate. They are burnt up till few are left ...

The city of emptiness is in ruins, every man bolts his door; ... there is lamentation in the streets; ... gladness is banished from the earth. The cities are left desolate, the gates are smashed to pieces.

For thus shall it be in all the world, in every nation, as when the olive trees are beaten and stripped, as when the vintage is done.

9. The Dalliance of the Eagles (for my brothers in Apollo, Henry Mollicone, Herman Weiss, Alcides Lanza). According to evolutionary biologists, sex as a mode of reproduction made its first appearance on earth about 1.2 billion years ago (and has been going strong ever since). In this movement I have set Walt Whitman's (1819-1892) great poem about observing two eagles making love. The movement is dedicated to three composers who have been close friends of mine for many years; I have incorporated brief musical quotations from each of them in my piece: Mollicone's *Coyote Tales*, Weiss's *Malletklaviersonata*, and Lanza's *Eidesis II*.

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,
Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance
of the eagles,
The rushing amorous contact high in space together,
The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce,
gyrating wheel,
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight
grappling,
In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight down-
ward falling,
Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a
moment's lull,
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting,
talons loosing,
Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their
separate diverse flight,
She hers, he his, pursuing.

10. Shir ha-shirim (Song of Songs) (for Erica Phare and Rick Bergh, 31 July 2010). We now pass from animal sexuality to the power of human love. I have chosen verses from the Latin version of the Song of Songs, that ancient Hebrew ode to erotic love that sits so strangely in the Old Testament.

Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi, qui pascitur inter lilia
donec aspires dies, et inclinentur umbræ.

*My beloved is mine and I am his. He pas-tures in a field of lilies
before day breathes, and the shadows of night are gone*

Surge Aquilo, et veni Auster, perfla hortum meum, et fluant aromata illius.
Veniat dilectus meus in hortum suum, et comedat fructum pomorum
suorum.

*Awake, north wind! O south wind, come. Send a breeze through my
garden, and carry its aromatic scents. Let my lover come into his
garden and taste its delicious fruit.*

Veni de Libano sponsa mea, veni de Libano, veni.

Oh come with me, my bride, come down with me from Lebanon.

Ostende mihi faciem tuam, sonet vox tua in auribus meis: vox enim tua
dulcis, et facies tua decora.

*reveal to me your face. Let your voice sound in my ears. For your
voice is sweet, and your face is graceful.*

Quam pulchra es, et quam decora, carissima, in deliciis!

How beautiful you are, and how graceful, dearest one, my delight.

Veni, dilecte mi, egrediamur in agrum, et videamus si floruit vinea, si flores
fructus parturiunt, si floruerunt mala Punica: ibi dabo tibi ubera mea.

*Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and let us see if the
grape blossoms have borne fruit, if the pomegranate is in flower.
There I will give my breasts to you.*

11. Mirrored Moon (*for Blythe Tretick*). In our ascent of the ladder of being we come to the summit of a mountain. Mountaintops have always been associated with places of vision. Han Shan, a ninth-century Chinese poet, describes his mystical experience atop Cold Mountain. The mezzo soprano soloist is accompanied by a solo cello. (Thanks to Ya Nan Zhang for helping me with the Chinese text.)

Gāo Gāo Fēng Dǐn Shàng
Sì Gù Jí Wú Biān
Dú Zuò Wú Rén Zhī
Gū Yùe Zhào Hán Quán
Quán Zhōng Qiě Wú Yùe
Yùe Zì Zài Qīng Tiān
Níng Cǐ Yì Qǔ Gē
Gē Zhōng Bú Shì Chán

*From a high mountain peak
The view extends forever
I sit here unknown
The moon is mirrored in Cold Spring
In the spring there is no moon
The moon is in the sky
I sing this one song
In the song there is no Zen*

12. La Rosa celestiale—Vande Saccidānandam (*for Antoinette Turgeon Anantata in memoriam*). As Dante in his *Divine Comedy* passes beyond the material universe he is taken to the centre of a gigantic rose. Looking up, he sees that the petals are inhabited by the souls of the redeemed in their ultimate perfection. He experiences the mystery of the godhead in a moment of vision and gives over his soul to “the love that moves the sun and all the other stars” (*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*). My music attempts a portrait in sound of this heavenly landscape, the terra promessa that is the terminus of all our desire, through a collage of songs sung by the heavenly beings. The first is taken from a Sanskrit hymn by Brahmabandhab Upādhyāya.² We also hear a multitude of alleluias, a verse of a mediaeval hymn to the Holy Spirit (Veni Sancte Spiritus), the song of the angelic choirs heard by the prophet Isaiah (Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus), and an hymn to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Salve Regina). Fragments of these sacred songs (in Sanskrit and in Latin) are heard sometimes in succession, and other times simultaneously. The listener becomes a traveler moving among the petals of the celestial rose stopping here and there to savour the heavenly music.

² Śri Swami Brahmabandhab Upādhyāya (1861-1907) was a Bengali Brahman who felt that Christian theology was limited by its dependence on Greek/ Western philosophic conceptual terminology and that deeper insights were possible with the help of “the religious insights of the Hindu soul.”

OM
VANDE SACCIDĀNANDAM
bhogi-lāñchita yogi-vāñchita carama-padam

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Parama purāṇa parātparam
Pūrṇam akhaṇḍa parāvaram
trisaṅga śuddham asaṅga buddham durvedam

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
et emitte caelitus
lucis tuae radium.
Veni, pater pauperum,
veni, dator munerum
veni, lumen cordium.

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Parama purāṇa parātparam
Pūrṇam akhaṇḍa parāvaram
trisaṅga śuddham asaṅga buddham durvedam

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.

Salve Regina, mater misericordiae:
Ad te clamamus, ad te suspiramus.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

Alleluia. Alleluia.

OM
VANDE SACCIDĀNANDAM
bhogi-lāñchita yogi-vāñchita carama-padam

ALLELUIA OM

OM.
*I bow to the One who is Being, Consciousness, and Bliss,
Scorned by the worldly, the desire of saints, the supreme Goal.,*

Alleluia. Alleluia.

*The Most High, the Eternal, the One beyond all,
Fullness undivided, most Near yet Inaccessible,
Threefold in Himself and Simple, pure Awareness, Holy, Pathless Mystery*

Alleluia. Alleluia.

*Come, Holy Spirit,
send forth the heavenly
radiance of your light.
Come, father of the poor,
come giver of gifts,
come, light of the heart.*

Alleluia. Alleluia.

*The Most High, the Eternal, the One beyond all,
Fullness undivided, most Near yet Inaccessible,
Threefold in Himself and Simple, pure Awareness, Holy, Pathless Mystery*

*Holy, holy, holy
Lord God of Hosts.*

*Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
To thee do we cry, to thee do we send up our sighs.
O compassionate, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.*

Alleluia. Alleluia.

OM.
*I bow to the One who is Being, Consciousness, and Bliss,
Scorned by the worldly, the desire of saints, the supreme Goal.*

ALLELUIA OM