

# **As We Are Changed**

**oratorio for soprano, tenor, chorus, and chamber orchestra**

Music by Carson Cooman (Op. 1340)

Libretto by Euan Tait

## ***Instrumentation***

Clarinet in B $\flat$  / doubling Bass Clarinet (in B $\flat$ )

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Piano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

## **Score in C**

(Bass clarinet sounds as written; Contrabass sounds one octave lower than written.)

Duration: ca. 65 minutes

- 1) If an intermission is desired, it should be taken at the end of Part One.
- 2) While there should not be an intermission at the end of Part Two, a longer break/gap (compared to gaps between movements) should be observed. This could be a tuning break, if needed.
- 3) If another composition shares the concert with this piece, the other composition must be played first.

**Commissioned by and dedicated to the Commonwealth Chorale (Boston, Massachusetts)  
in celebration of David Carrier's 40th anniversary as artistic director, 2019–20**

# *As We Are Changed* (2019)

oratorio for soprano and tenor soloists, SATB chorus, and chamber orchestra

Music by Carson Cooman (b. 1982)

Libretto by Euan Tait (b. 1968)

## Synopsis

Our world and our lives are transformational and in constant transformation, and this work is the music of those transformations. The earth we live on does not stay still but evolves and changes; our lives are changed through our own personal struggles, through meetings with those whose difference from us becomes a teacher, with sudden catalytic events, and from the daily, determined creativity of love working and spreading outwards from our humanity.

### ***Part One: Collisions***

The work begins with a great cry, worlds and lives in the process of creation and destruction; a creation and recreation myth, that everything is made from a great cry of anguish as much as a creative command. When human beings love, they are utterly changed, sometimes even broken by that love; loving another person means that we meet and are changed by their life story and their cry of pain—in the journey of a human relationship, human lives and ways of thinking and being are remade. The chorus sings for the great catalytic cries of all human beings, which are heard as far off yet powerful sounds, to which we are drawn in compassion—to answer and try to heal. Yet it is true that our pain can either become a source of compassion for others—or a cause of further bitterness and pain.

The two soloists represent two young souls lost from our shared lives, the ending of their life-journey ambiguous, mysterious, hinted at. They are both familiar people yet completely unknown—troubled, confusing to us, the mystery of people who fail to fit in and whose difference can stir anger, violence and prejudice in others. Yet their humanity is emerging into the new—the new planet a metaphor for their transformed existence. The soloists sing of their stories, and the movement ends with a tender song of remembrance: love's determined, fierce, compassionate response to them.

### ***Part Two: Song of My Music***

The music becomes wild with rejoicing life and is the music of the creativity of our humanity, of our vividly living world, of seascapes, creatures, erupting into life through the gift of music, of the creation of human souls and the world through music.

### ***Part Three: Songs of Transformation***

The final part is the music of our personal and shared transformations. We stand on the edge of the new always, our lives a creative offering, constantly renewed in love, constantly open to where the cries of pain from our fellow human beings take us. Who is calling out to me? Where shall I meet you? Our encounters with music always change us, for music is a powerful creative force, and we are constantly struggling, yet also changed and transformed.

Below is provided a sample of how this work should be listed in a printed concert program. Careful attention should be paid to the manner and formatting of listing the parts and movements.

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## **Part One: Collisions**

1. Collisions
2. Two souls on a far planet
3. All the horses of the world vanish
4. All of me
5. Receiving his soul
6. Lullaby
7. What I was (1)
8. The ignored
9. What I was (2)
10. Cradle song for a young adult

*Intermission*

## **Part Two: Song of My Music**

11. My music began
12. The creation of a life
13. Birth
14. Lion, lioness
15. Creation of the world through birdsong
16. Song for musicians

## **Part Three: Songs of Transformations**

17. No home
18. A living music
19. Soul seascape
20. A human music

# LIBRETTO

## PART ONE: Collisions

### 1. *Collisions*

Cries  
of pain  
spark life  
as feral fire,  
the crush  
and burst  
of rock  
accretes.

We are remade  
when we break:  
our earth shakes  
centrifugal, our cries  
tear down trees,  
wrench the land  
open, squall  
the waters,  
fracture the seed,  
make new, life  
from broken days.

We  
are all shatterings,  
our lives  
made from each other,  
spinning  
towards another,  
our stories collisions,  
our pain  
our compassion  
or destruction.

### 2. *Two souls on a far planet*

What you were is over. You  
are utterly changed; you have left us.

You cannot sing now as you used to;  
your music has shifted, dissolved,

remade. You are on a new planet,  
your life renewed in a different direction,

for this is not the earth you expected,  
and you are not the same:

here, you are the fall of a methane rain,  
an infinitely slow falling

onto a crystalline soil  
delicate as glass made from ice;

tears are the great seas here, sing  
the whisper-breezes of this strange world.

Now, my brother, my sister,  
beloved, belonging, yet unknown,

you are elsewhere, far out of sight  
of those who still love you,

you are the unexplored souls,  
but here, in this distant place at last

you've met something hidden in your  
lost lives, your greatest forgotten hunger.

### 3. *All the horses of the world vanish*

The day I was lost, my cries  
disturbed all horses of the world.  
I fell in their fields, bleeding,  
my pain buzzing about my head,  
and something in my invisible cries  
terrified all the herds. Their breath  
reared, the frost splintered  
as they turned the grass  
to a thunder of breaking glass  
and hoof-beats, wakened voices,  
then all of them leapt into the air,  
as if the sky were a vast aerial ocean  
and they were escaping; all those  
who loved me and searched for me  
knew the horses had gone,  
had left us all.

### 4. *All of me*

You haven't heard  
my story, not this,

under the surface,  
the molten sea

of what I was,  
of all I've become.

### **5. *Receiving his soul***

I am already gliding  
across the surface of another planet,  
weightless here, I can never  
set foot or root in this soil:

I am held in the broken fingers  
of love that cannot hold me; none  
has ever condemned me here,

I flee from the place  
I fell; soil and flesh  
cry deep wounds.

I am gone from you.  
I am exo-planet.  
I am new.

### **6. *Lullaby***

They, brother and sister broken,  
like the first children awoken here,  
born into this other world, held  
in the web of a shattered love,  
in love stripped naked, confused  
by their leaving, but here, breaking  
into an unknown music.

Here, their pain remains,  
aches, embedded in us;  
we hold the rage of our loss,  
our grief sung like this;  
in us great waves form,  
gather, and do not break.

### **7. *What I was (1)***

I was not there,  
among you, ever.  
I remember what I was:  
I was always bird, rising  
from my room, troubling  
the trees as I passed,  
leaving my brothers  
crying out for me:  
“who are you?”

I was always lost,  
teachers' and parents' despair  
at how little I achieved,  
what I failed to do. My heart  
echoes still with their fear.

At night,  
during the slow rest of time,  
I would watch ceaselessly  
for whatever it was  
to come to me,  
whomever it was  
who would meet me  
and say, welcome, my sister.  
Whoever it was  
would never come.

I was bird.  
I cried: who will hear me,  
who answer me?  
The trees stirred  
with the watching,  
pacing creatures.  
I heard the small panics  
of my brothers' sleep.  
I walked out  
into the winter fields at dawn,  
then lifted my wings  
from the silent earth.

### **8. *The ignored***

What you guessed in silence then  
has become a life-splitting cry

ejected from their memory,  
crowding the torn sky.

### **9. *What I was (2)***

It was the last hours before dawn,  
the last cries of the partying young  
before first light. I closed the bar,  
brought the shutters down, left.  
My shift was done. I raced  
like a relieved, escaped gazelle  
into the woods I'd always known  
and played in since I was a child,  
hide and seek and gone among  
the purr and roar of the beasts.  
But now, the taste of the air sweet  
and cold, behind me, sudden  
angry cries: “We know and hate  
who you are. You will not live  
among us,” and then a flash  
of terrible light inside my head,  
and my whole body tore,

cried out, and I fell bleeding,  
soil and saliva, holding in  
my last unanswered words.

**10. Cradle song for a young adult**

My beloved child, let me at least  
be this for you, holding your spirit  
at the birth of my mourning  
in the eggshell of my music.

My beloved child, let me at least  
cradle your wounded hands  
in the broken cup of my fingers:  
for touch is love, surviving.

My beloved child, let me wash  
your being in these tears, until  
you know how fully you are loved  
and my rivers are not drought.

My beloved child, my tendon love  
is flesh-body, is thread-snapped,  
but you are here, you stand  
at my side, your body as rain,

and I am softly calling:  
be loved, be loved, be loved.

**PART TWO: Song of My Music**

**11. My music began**

My music began  
when the sea played with me,  
when I swam out and I looked down  
from my fragile boat of skin  
into the vivid deep,  
and seabirds cried above  
and wouldn't be silent,  
when the sea turned to fire  
in the utter stillness of sunset.  
The sea is a child  
and knows my heart;  
the sea is the heart of me.

**12. The creation of a life**

Music's heart, restless with love,  
searches the void and calls:

My children, come; larval songs,  
majesty of fires, flare into life!

And we were born as music, scattering  
our many voices and dances

into the world; the music in us  
enrages and renews lives.

We are troubled music;  
our longings and child cries

create the wind-howl world,  
love's sea bellow and roar.

**13. Birth**

Before I was born,  
I was not child, but music,

I began to sing in the womb;  
my mother's blood heard me,

caught the fire of me: her voice,  
her music, drew me into the world.

**14. Lion, lioness**

The pride of the world gathers:  
we are the wild, world sweeping fire  
of lion, lioness roars: this is our music,  
the music we fought to find;  
this is love, feral, persistent.

**15. Creation of the world through birdsong**

When music created life, first  
music created the birds  
to sing us into life,  
counterpoints  
of wren, finch, oriole,  
grosbeaks and tanagers;  
their music sang our flesh  
into rhythms of blood,  
melodies and dances  
that cannot be finished, ever,

for our song thunders  
through our days, breaking  
river banks, fixed courses.

### **16. *Song for musicians***

Welcome to all who sing on the rapids,  
those who call through music's rivers  
to the unheard ache in the depths  
of fear-thunder hearts.

In fizzing, white-water beings  
of voices, a constant singing;  
our hearts hear, resonate  
with light's riotous yes.

## **PART THREE: Songs of Transformation**

### **17. *No home***

You come here, expecting home,  
yet there is no journey home.  
Music has changed you.  
Live, be unfamiliar.

You are listeners, witnesses,  
flocks of souls alighting  
in this place where your heart,  
has rested, heard,  
yet is always restless,  
always on the edge of flight.

Who you are  
changes the lives you touch.  
You learn and teach love.  
Here is the perch of the soul,  
your resting place, yet here  
you wait on the edge  
of your transformation.

### **18. *A living music***

Music, like breath, infuses this place,  
and, like breathing, you won't know it's changed

until the change is done: stone no longer stone,  
but note-shimmer, a water wall that pours

from the windows, from the first racing life  
that begins to sing here, brass-flash of light,

the violin's high bird cry, the doublebass growl  
in the belly of the human, the harp itself

the nearest music comes to water's own voice.  
All of you, caught up in these lives as they change

to a rapid river: singer, see the story your singing  
will unfold. Watch, child of music, your becoming,

here, and roads beyond. See the life you carry  
pour into the stone. You will not leave quietly.

### **19. *Soul seascape***

No warning: the storm in me  
returned, and I knew again  
the old familiar, my soul-struggle,  
the oncoming waves rising  
high, alive in my blood.

### **20. *A human music***

Friends, listen:  
you are unbroken music.

Listen, remember,  
you are active, fervent laughter,

the natural music  
of love, speaking to silence, or fear.

In your being, music  
becomes the sound of a long healing,

yours perhaps,  
or someone your searching love reveals,

alert, longing  
for your song, far off, unfolding, real.

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