

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.

(Euan Tait)

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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

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 Transformation

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

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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,
but 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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