

New Zealand Premieres

Saturday 4 April 2009

Auckland Town Hall, THE EDGE®

Permission has been sought for the reproduction and printing of all texts.



CONCERT TEXTS

1. JEFF LIN – *Exile from the Native Land*

How Can a Man Escape Life's Sorrow and Regret? (Midnight Song)

Li Yu

人生愁恨何能免
銷魂獨我情何限
故國夢重歸
覺來雙淚垂
高樓誰與上
長記秋晴望
往事已成空
還如一夢中

Rén shēng chóu hèn hé néng miǎn
Xiāo hún dú wǒ qíng hé xiàn
Gù guó mèng chóng guī
Jué lái shuāng lèi chuí
Gāo lóu shuí yǔ shàng
Cháng jì qiū qíng wàng
Wǎng shì yǐ chéng kōng
Huán rú yī mèng zhōng

*How can a man escape life's sorrow and regret?
What limit is there to my solitary grief?
I returned to my homeland in a dream,
As I awakened, I shed two tears.
Who now will climb up those high towers,
I remember those clear autumn scenes.
Those past events have lost their meaning,
They disappear as in a dream*

2. **ANTHONY RITCHIE** - *Rain* - by Hone Tuwhare

I can hear you
making small holes
in the silence
rain

If I were deaf
the pores of my skin
would open to you
and shut

And I
should know you
by the lick of you
if I were blind

the something
special smell of you
when the sun cakes
the ground

the steady
drum-roll sound
you make
when the wind drops

But if I
should not hear
smell or feel or see
you

you would still
define me
disperse me
wash over me
rain

1970

for baritone and orchestra

In 2008, in place of the usual request for composers to submit works for a reading session, the Auckland Philharmonia and New Zealand Opera combined forces to offer composers a chance to write a work for solo voice and orchestra. My proposal was to write a piece towards a possible opera project based on the crash of an Air New Zealand sight-seeing flight in the Antarctic on 28 November 1979. At the time it was the world's fourth worst aviation disaster, killing 257 passengers and crew.

In searching for a suitable text, I turned initially to the report of Royal Commission, and Justice Peter Mahon's own book on the events. Justice Mahon headed the Royal Commission which exonerated the pilots, and laid the blame for the accident at the feet of Air New Zealand. The original crash investigation had blamed pilot error, but the Royal Commission found that a combination of a change of co-ordinates entered into the computer without the knowledge of the pilots, and the phenomenon of "whiteout", caused the crash.

"Erebus: a poem" by Bill Sewell was published in 1999. It is an extended poem in thirty-four sections, and covers not only the events of the crash, but also the aftermath and its effect on New Zealand society. "Breaking the Quiet" is the sixth section of the poem and describes the isolation and quiet of the crash site, the crash itself, and the scattered personal effects. Amongst the effects is a diary "...dedicated to the glory of God" who had "...looked away at the wrong moment".

A note on the author:

Bill Sewell (1951–2003), poet, was born in Athens and spent much of his early life in various parts of Southern Europe (Barcelona, Ankara and Beirut). After primary and secondary schooling in England, he finished his education in New Zealand where he studied German at the University of Auckland and completed a doctorate on the poetry and politics of Hans Magnus Enzensberger. He lectured in German at Otago University, worked as an editor for John McIndoe and the University of Otago Press and, after obtaining a law degree from Victoria University of Wellington, was a legal researcher for the Law Commission and a freelance writer and editor.

source: www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/sewellbill.html

"Breaking the Quiet" was written for baritone Hadleigh Adams, whose assistance and willingness to take on the project was greatly appreciated.

Breaking the Quiet

Nobody was there
to hear the impact
but the quiet
that came after
would have been immense –

before the skuas
scenting the news
came skidding out of the mist
before the breeze
lifted to a whistle –

quieter than light

percolating
through the ice
quieter than
the prickling of nerves

quieter than snow
its gentle entrance
quieter than sleep
quieter even than
the hissing of time.

The approach
like a focussed wind
out of the North;
the explosive abrasion
up the slope

to a full-stop;
the blaze that gorged
itself finally to a flicker;
and the sooty trail
of what remained

quiet now except
for the items
(those mute appurtenances)
that began to chatter
as never before:

cameras flung away
in mid-exposure;
ear-rings isolated
from their owner
and from each other;

a flight bag that had rubbed
somebody's shoulder
since 1964; a shoe;
a cap; a wristwatch;
and a diary dedicated

to the glory of God
who had never been one
to break the quiet
who had looked away
at the wrong moment

who had been fooled too
by the blend of white
who had never actually
made it
that far South.

(Bill Sewell from "Erebus")

4. *The Angle of Reflection* – Anthony Young

Character description:

SABRYN, an educated middle-class mother who has taken time off work to be with her new baby Evan, feels overwhelmed by responsibility and unprepared to cope. The fact that her son has been born blind only exacerbates the situation, and adds the burden of unspecified and surely unmerited guilt. (Despite her doctors' assurances that the blindness is not her fault, every cigarette she smoked in her youth, every folic acid pill she forgot to take, and every feeling of genetic inferiority is coming back to haunt her.)

If the performer is at all over thirty, you can add the warnings about “geriatric pregnancy” into her vague but persistent sense that she is somehow to blame for Evan’s disability.

Her fears about being unable to explain the essence of light to her vision-impaired child are simply the extreme manifestation, the “limit case”, of her serious concerns about her ability to raise and protect her child. (For example, when she gets carried away with the images conjured up by “searing”, “blinding”, etc., we can hear her distress at the violence and injustice of the world in which she has to raise her kid.) And when she starts to work through these worries, it is because she starts to realise that there is more than one way to experience life... that she can use sounds (both words and music), among other things, to give Evan a sense of even the concepts and phenomena that will be most removed from his senses... and that ultimately, he will find his own way to live in the world, in ways that she probably cannot even imagine. She will simply do her best to help him get there.

SABRYN’s initial sense that her she and her son are somehow missing out on the essence of life (through her incompetence and his blindness) is very understandable. However, this is not a piece that says, gee, it’s terrible to be blind. It is, rather, about a parent learning to focus on what she as a mother can do for her child, and what he as her son actually needs. It’s kind of a micro-drama about love, faith, and acceptance.

The Angle of Reflection

Librettist: Leanna Brodie
Composer: Anthony Young

I.

SABRYN is standing, lost in thought, at some distance from a crib. She is sunk in her anxiety at the enormity of her task: preparing her blind infant son to understand and move confidently through the world:

Light
Is what shows us the shape of the world,
Sight
Is the sense that makes sense of it all,
How
Will I show you the shape of the world?
How
Can my words ever show
All your eyes will never know...

In the crib, her baby begins crying. SABRYN picks him up, rocks him, and tries to comfort him – but still seems uncomfortable herself. She holds him out to face her.

Evan:
You are my son.
See, I'm your Mama.
Mama, baby.

He fusses, not consoled. Realising her mistake, she cradles him against her.

Silly,
Mummy dum-dum.
You can't see Mama.
Still, though... Maybe...

II.

SABRYN pulls herself together and rehearses how she will one day give EVAN a scientific explanation for what he cannot perceive for himself: light.

The angle of incidence
Is equal to the angle of reflection.
The index of refraction
Is relative to light in a vacuum.

Now the explanations start becoming less absolute, as she becomes more unsure that this is going to work:

Light is a particle,
Or then again it's a wave.
Light goes to infinity,
or dies out far from its source

Struggling to regain a positive attitude, she reaches for the memory of a bible story...
The light was the first of things
...And tries to reassure Evan the way parents reassure their children that the setting sun will come up again.
And it is a thing you can count on.
Like Mama...

III.

Now SABRYN shakes herself out of her doldrums and tries a new approach. Through tone of voice, the synaesthesia of music, touching and moving Evan, or whatever else it takes, she struggles to impart a sense of how light FEELS – the experience of light.

Tentatively:
Blue...
Green...

Reaching for a childlike whimsy and delight in the language of light:
Twinkle
Shimmer
Sparkle
Glimmer

Now her mental images are becoming more violent and despairing -- words of metal and fire:
Glint
Glare
Flash
Flare

Her despair is taking her over, despite herself:
Searing
Blinding
Blinding
Blinding...

Appalled by what she has just said, she takes a moment to collect herself, and tries again. Very uncertainly:
Blue...
Blue is...
Salty like the sea.
Green...
Green is...
Gardens after rain.

She inhales the scent of them. She is growing in confidence:
Yellow: the softness of petals, and warm like a fall afternoon,
Orange: the fire as it crackles, and tart like a morning of juice,
Scarlet, crimson, fuchsia, vermilion, blood and wine...
Rainbow, halo, aurora:

With relief and even triumph, she realizes:

we will be fine!
we will be fine!
we will be fine!

IV.

She returns to the structure of the first section, but this time she is answering her own questions as much as his.

Light

They say *you* see a small part of light

Sight

Just shows Mama a small part of light

I

Will show you the shape of the world

You

Will find your own way to know

More than I could ever show...

Suddenly inspired, she holds him up in a shaft of sunlight.

Here, you can *feel* it

Here, feel it on your face

Evan:

This is the sun.

5. Medea's Soliloquy

Based on MEDEA by Euripides, Text adapted by PENNY DODD

Oh, my sons

I must leave you
Exiled to another land
Banished from your lives
Never to dress your brides, your marriage beds,
or light the torches on your wedding days.

Ah! the cost of my arrogance
It is my fault

All wasted the pain, the anguish, the agony of childbirth
Gone the hopes of a loving old age
Of your dear hands dressing me when I am dead,
Dead and gone my dreams and hopes
I must live, bitter and joyless
And you will have a city and a home where you will live forever,
Never to see your mother again

Oh my children,
my darlings,
your eyes,
the pain of your last smiles

My heart dissolves when I gaze into their eyes
No! no! I cannot do it,
My plans I must abandon
I must take them away with me.
By ending these two innocent lives
I hurt myself twice over
I cannot do it

Ah! Ah!
My enemies will laugh at me!
Away with this cowardice
I will not weaken

Oh, my heart!
Make me stop

Let these children live
Let them come away with me
And we will live together in exile

How can I leave them, here,
at the mercy of my enemies?
They would surely find them a cruel death.

But... they have to...die

It is too late

Give me your hands, give your mother your hands to kiss

So sweet

The touch of you

The bloom of your skin

Your sweet breath

Go! I can no longer look at you

I am lost

I know what I am doing

Passion drives me, past reason to everlasting pain.

6. Matthew Crawford - A place to stand text by Karlo Mila

it was on the marae ātea
in the blue-veined moonlight
somewhere near Halcombe

I learned
tūrangawaewae

I felt the earth
beneath me tremor

a wiri
a wero
a haka

it was
named
known
sure of itself
connected
to awa
maunga
iwi

rich red mud
shuddering

haemoglobin
in the soil

transforming
landscape entire
into urupā

I
could not
stand upright
there

“ka mate ka mate”
beating eardrum
in the earth

enter
Oceania
her blue body
promising
distant shores

a blue taupou

follow that star

seek
unfamiliar
constellations

speak alien tongues

follow the bloodlines
to the *terra incognita*
of your own body

flat-footed
I began to swim