

Lansing McLoskey

ZEALOT CANTICLE

SATB choir and clarinet
Text by Wole Soyinka

*Commissioned by The Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble
and concert:nova*



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Dedicated to all those who stand firm in the face of oppression or injustice.

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SATB choir and B \flat clarinet

Texts by Wole Soyinka

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|-----|--------------------------|--------|
| I. | Renunciation (Preludium) | c.3:30 |
| II. | Canticle | c.8:15 |

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

Accidentals apply to the octave in which they appear and hold throughout the measure. In chromatic passages courtesy accidentals are given.

♩ = ♩ at all meter changes.

In the first half of the second movement, barlines appear as dashes or dotted-lines; this is to emphasize that there should be no sense of pulse or meter at all.

The mezzo-soprano/contralto soloist may be drawn from the soprano or alto section; likewise, the baritone soloist may be from the tenor or bass section. The important thing is that the soloists have a rich, full tone (I hesitate to say “quasi-operatic,” but it should contrast with the clear, bell-like, veil of the choir).

Approximate duration: 12 minutes



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“The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny.”

Wole Soyinka, Dec. 14th, 1971

Wole Soyinka (b. 1934) is a Nigerian poet, playwright, novelist, and recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1967 Soyinka was arrested and imprisoned for “civil defiance.” His crimes? Denouncing the suppression of human rights and free speech by the military dictatorship of General Yakubu Gowon, intervening in an attempt to avoid the Nigerian/Biafran civil war, and condemning the genocide of the Igbo people. In the decades following his release, Soyinka has remained an outspoken advocate for human rights.

During his two years in prison, Soyinka spent several stints in solitary confinement and went on a number of hunger strikes; some near fatal. He chronicled his imprisonment in the book *The Man Died*, much of which was written in secret between the lines of books smuggled in by friends and sympathetic jailers and on scraps of paper and tissue hidden in the cracks in his cell, with a stolen pen, then with ingeniously homemade ink and hand-crafted writing utensils.

In addition to the obvious physical effect of extreme fasts, there are the psychological and mental consequences. Soyinka writes of “achieving true weightlessness...blown about by the lightest breeze, by the lightest lyrical thought or metaphor” and describes spells of delirium, hallucination, but also trance-like states and unparalleled lucidity. Near the end of his imprisonment (thus the end of the book), the three-part phrase “*I need nothing. I feel nothing. I desire nothing.*” becomes a repeated refrain; a mantra, if you will. The phrase is both an internal safe-haven for Soyinka’s mind as well as a defiant response to his interrogators.

In 2002 Soyinka published a set of poems titled “Twelve Canticles for the Zealot”; a strangely beautiful and terrifying look into the mind(s) of fanatics, containing a subtle catalogue of the horrific results, past and present. I decided to set two of these poems (I. and IX.).

In the first poem I couldn’t help but reflect upon the parallels between the delirium of the religious fanatic and the delirium of Soyinka himself during hunger fasts. Self-deprivation and hallucinations are not the sole prerogatives of the unjustly imprisoned, after all, but also common among zealots of another sort. Visions of God are hailed in prophets and scripture, but wielded as weapons by the demented. Soyinka’s own renunciations of self (“I need/feel/desire nothing.”) are renunciations and exhortations echoed in ultra-devotees from Buddhist monks and Hindu ascetics to Christian hermits and the Taliban.

Is there then not a thin line between extreme devotion – zealotry – and radicalism? And that line is both personal and public. One zealot preaches against the errors of a different faith, another spews hatred towards those who hold that faith. One extols devotion, the other breeds divisiveness. We only have to turn on the television to see how small the step can be from self-righteousness to roadside bombs and political/social oppression.

The second poem – the heart of the piece – begins with a Soyinka making a universal plea for peace from multiple languages and religious cultures. This is voiced by the choir; our voice, the voice of the “99%,” to use a currently popular term. Solo voices sing in unison with the clarinet; are they saints? Do they plead with or for the zealots? Throughout, the clarinet provides commentary and images of sound, at times weeping, at times hopeful, at times violent and bordering on insanity.

While writing the piece, the figure of Wole Soyinka’s gaunt frame was constantly before me; weakened by hunger and isolation, yet ultimately stronger than iron bars and dictator alike.

Zealot Canticle was co-commissioned by Donald Nally and the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble and concert:nova, and composed while a Fellow at the MacDowell Colony. I’d like to express my gratitude to Donald, VAE, and concert:nova for their devotion to music as a *living* and always-relevant art form.

ZEALOT CANTICLE

RENUNCIATION (PRELUDIUM)

He wakes from a prolonged delirium, swears
He has seen the face of God.
God help all those whose fever never raged
Or has subsided.

I need nothing.

I feel nothing.

I desire nothing.

CANTICLE

The meek shall inherit the earth ...
Blessed are the peacemakers ...
Shalom ... Shalom ... Shalom ...
Irosu wonrin, irosu wonrin.
Salaam ailekum, ailekum
Shanti ... shanti ... shanti ...
Oom ... oom ... oom ... ooom ...

Seek havens of peace on ocean floors,
Submarine depths, in lost worlds, black holes
Collapsed galaxies, in hermit caves
In jungle fastnesses and arctic wastes
Thorns of crowns and hairy shirts, beds of nails,
The saintly cheek that turns the other side, but—
Not in texts, not by learned rote. It's there
The unmeeek prove inheritors of the earth.

They are the scripture grooms, possessive
To the last submissive dot. Punctilious
Guards of annotations, they sleepwalk blind to all
But the fatal hiatus:
Boom for oom and—sword for Word.
What is missing is—fulfilled!

ZEALOT CANTICLE

Renunciation (Preludium)

Music by Lansing McLoskey

Text: Wole Soyinka

Slowly awakening ♩ = c.52

Soprano *p*
He wakes from a pro - longed de - li - ri - um,

Alto *p*
He wakes from a pro - longed de - li - ri - um,

Tenor *p*
He wakes from a pro - longed de - li - ri - um,

Bass

S *mf* *p*
swears He has seen the face of God.

A *mf* *p*
swears has seen the face of God.

T *mf* *p* *mp*
He has seen the face of God. God

B

S *mp* *mf*
God help those whose fe - ver ne - ver raged raged

S.2 *mp* *mf*
God help all those whose fe - ver ne - ver raged

A *mp* *mf*
God help all those whose fe - ver ne - ver raged raged

T *mf*
help all those whose fe - ver ne - ver raged

B

18

S
or _____ sub - sid - - - - ed.

S.2
or raged _____ or sub - sid - - - - ed.

A
raged or sub - - - - - sid - - - ed.

A.2
raged or sub - - - - - sid - - - - -

T
or _____ sub - sid - - - - ed _____ sub - sid -

B
mf
or _____ sub - - - - sid - - - - ed.

23

A

S

S.2

A

A.2
_____ ed.

T
ed. *p* _____ *pp* _____ *pp* no cresc. sempre
No - - - - - thing _____ I need _____ no -

T.2
p _____ *pp* _____ *pp* no cresc. sempre
No - - - - - thing _____ I need _____ no -

B
p _____ *pp* _____ *pp* no cresc. sempre
No - - - - - thing _____ I need _____ no -

B.2
p _____ *pp* _____ *pp* no cresc. sempre
No - - - - - thing _____ I need _____ no -

29

A

T

T.2

B

B.2

Clar

thing I feel no - - thing I

thing I feel no - - thing I

thing I feel no - - thing I

thing I feel no - - thing I

thing I feel no - - thing I

thing I feel no - - thing I

legato & cantabile (but somewhat restrained)

p

34

A

T

T.2

B

Clar

pp

de - sire no - thing I feel

de - sire no - thing I feel

de - - - sire no - - - thing I feel

(tutti)

de - sire no - thing I feel

de - sire no - thing I feel

mp

39

A
no - thing I need no - thing no -

T
no - thing I need no - thing no -

T.2
no - thing I need no - thing no -

B
no - thing need no - thing no -

Clar
39

45

A
- thing de - sire no - thing no -

T
- thing de - sire no - thing no -

T.2
- thing de - sire no - thing no -

B
- thing de - sire no - thing no -

Clar
45

51

A
- - thing no - - - - thing

T
- - thing *tutti* no - - - - thing

T.2
- - thing

B
- - thing no - - - - thing

Clar
51

Canticle

Aggressively, with great freedom ♩ = c.72

Extremely raw, harsh sound, bordering on distortion, especially for first 4 measures.

Clarinet

fff

Durations of 32nd notes do not have to be 'metronomically even'; play in a wild, agitated manner, basically as fast as possible.

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

A *Placid, chant-like* ♩ = c.64 *(in the distance, like a faded memory)*

S

pp evenly, no cresc.

The meek shall in - her - it the earth...

A

pp evenly, no cresc.

The meek shall in - her - it the earth...

T

pp evenly, no cresc.

The meek shall in - her - it the earth...

B

pp evenly, no cresc.

The meek shall in - her - it the earth...

Clarinet

mf *p*

Tempo primo

S
A
T
B

Clar

Clar

B *Placid, chant-like* ♩ = c.64

S
A
T
B

Clar

Tempo primo

23

S
— are the peace - ma - - - kers...

A
— are the peace - ma - - - kers... *(alto no decresc.)*

T
8
— are the peace - ma - - - kers...

B
— are the peace - ma - - - kers...

Clar

23

fff

27

S

A

T
8

B

Clar

27

29

S

A

T
8

B

Clar

29

3

C *Still placid; but moving a bit more* ♩ = c.68

S *p* Sha - lom... Sha - lom... *pp* Sha - lom...

A *p* Sha - lom... Sha - lom... *pp* Sha - lom...

T *p* Sha - lom... Sha - lom... *pp* Sha - lom...

B *p* Sha - lom... Sha - lom... *pp* Sha - lom...

Clar *pp*

D *Largo tranquillo* ♩ = c.58

S *pp* Ir - - o - - - su

A *pp* Ir - - o - - - su

T *pp* Ir - - o - - - su

B *pp* Ir - - o - - - su

Mezzo-soprano/contralto soloist *warmly, broadly mp* Seek ha - vens of peace on

Clar *dolce e flautando ppp mp (always shadowing the soloists)*

* From **D** to **F** the choir should have no crescendos or swells, except at m.43. It should be barely discernable, like a thin veil draped over the soloists. Do not over articulate; in fact, consonants should be barely articulated.

42

S won - - - - rin, ir - - - - - 0 -

A won - - - - rin, ir - - - - - 0 -

T won - - - - rin, ir - - - - - 0 -

B won - - - - rin, ir - - - - - 0 -

Mezzo soloist o - cean floors, Sub - ma - rine depths, 3

Clar 42 o - cean floors, Sub - ma - rine depths, 3

p *pp*



45

S - - - - su won - - - - rin. Sa -

A - - - - su won - - - - rin. Sa -

T - - - - su won - - - - rin. Sa -

B - - - - su won - - - - rin. Sa -

Mezzo soloist in lost worlds, black holes Col - lapsed Col - lapsed ga - 3 *mf* *mp* *mf*

Clar 45 in lost worlds, black holes Col - lapsed Col - lapsed ga - 3 *mf* *p* *mf*

49

S
- - laam ai - - - - le - - - - kum, ai - - -

A
- - laam ai - - - - le - - - - kum, ai - - -

T
8 - - laam ai - - - - le - - - -

B
- - laam ai - - - - le - - - -

Mezzo soloist
la - xies, in her - mit caves In jung - le

Clar
49

52

S (div.) (unis.)
- - - - le - - - - kum Shan - ti...

A (div.) (unis.)
- - - - le - - - - kum Shan - ti...

T
8 - - kum Shan - ti...

B
- - kum Shan - ti...

Mezzo soloist
pushing forward...
fast - nes - ses and ar - ctic wastes

Clar
52

E

56

S shan - ti... shan - - - - - ti... (floating)

A shan - ti... shan - - - - - ti...

T shan - ti... shan - - - - - ti...

B shan - ti... shan - - - - - ti...

Mezzo soloist *mf* Thorns of crowns and hair - y

Baritone soloist *mf* Thorns of crowns and hair - y

Clar 56

60

S

A

T

B

Mezzo soloist *mp* shirts, beds of nails,

Baritone soloist *mp* shirts, beds of nails,

Clar 60 *p* *mp*

* Pronounced "ōm" (like the Hindu mantra), not "oom" as in "boom".

64

S * Oom... oom...

A * Oom... oom...

T * Oom... oom...

B * Oom... oom...

Mezzo soloist

Baritone soloist *mf* the saint-ly cheek that turns the oth-er side, but but

Clarinet *p* *mp* *p*

69

S oom...

A oom...

T oom...

B oom...

Mezzo soloist *mf* Not in texts, not by learn-ed rote. It's there the un-meek prove

Baritone soloist *mf* It's there the

Clarinet *mf* *mp*

mf

73

S oom... They are the scrip-ture

A oom... They are the scrip-ture

T oom... They are scrip-ture

B oom... They scrip-ture

Mezzo soloist *f* in - her - i - tors of the earth. *p*

Baritone soloist *f* un-meek prove in - her - i - tors of the earth. *p*

Clarinet 73 *f* *mf* *mp*

78

S grooms, pos-ses - sive to the last sub-mis-sive do(t).* Punc-til - i - ous guards of an - no - ta -

A grooms, pos-ses - sive to the last sub-mis-sive dot. "t" * guards of an - no - ta -

T grooms, pos-ses - sive to the last sub-mis-sive dot. "t" * Guards an - no - ta -

B grooms, pos-ses - sive to the last sub-mis-sive dot. "t" * Guards an - no - ta -

* Altos, tenors, basses: Cresc. into the downbeat of beat 4 and place an exaggerated "t" right on the beat. Sopranos: do not articulate the "t" in "dot."

82

mp *f*

S - tions, they sleep-walk blind to all but the fa - tal

A - tions, they sleep-walk blind to all but the fa - tal

T - - tions they sleep-walk blind to all but the fa - tal

B - - tions fa - - - -

Clarinet *quasi-mf*

From G to I, clarinet solo is not in strict time.
 Play in an angular, jagged, improvisational manner, becoming increasingly wild and furious. Breathe where necessary.

G

87

S hi - - - a - - - - - tus:

A hi - - - a - - - - - tus:

T hi - - - a - - - - - tus:

B tal hi - - - a - - - - - tus:

Clarinet *cresc.*

89 *f* *ff*

S fa - - - tal hi - - - a - - - - - - - - - tus:

A fa - - - tal hi - - - a - - - - - - - - - tus:

T fa - - - tal hi - - - a - - - - - - - - - tus:

B *f* *ff*

fa - - - - - tal hi - - - - - a - - - - - - - - -

Clar *f*

91

S

A

T

B tus:

Clar *ff*

H *Grinding with rage!* ♩ = c.52 * Almost yelling; don't worry about a "pretty tone"! Really exaggerate consonants ("b" in "boom" and "d" in "sword").

93

S *fff* * Boom for

A *fff* * Boom for

T *fff* * Boom for

B *fff* * Boom for

Clar *fff* Play in an unmetred, irregular fashion, really exaggerating the accents.



** Sopranos and altos divisi: Half gliss up a 1/2-step to pitch on the word "and."

95

S *pp sub.* oom and *fff* sword

A *pp sub.* oom and *fff* sword

T *pp sub.* oom and *fff* sword

B *pp sub.* oom and *fff* sword

Clar *fff*

97 *pp sub.*

S for Word.

A for Word.

T for Word.

B for Word.

Clar 97



99

S

A

T

B

Clar 99

101 **I** *pp*

S Oom...

A *pp* Half of the altos gliss up from B# (C₂) to C#.
Oom... *Glissando*

T *pp* Half of the tenors gliss up from C# to D.
Oom... *Glissando*

B *pp*
Oom...

Mezzo soloist *mp*
What is mis - - - sing

Clar 101 *p*
3

106

S Oom...

A *Glissando*
Oom...

T *Glissando*
Oom...

B Oom...

Mezzo soloist *mp*
What is mis - sing is ful -

Clar 106 *p*

111 *p*

S
is ful - filled.

S.2

A

T

B

Mezzo soloist
- - - filled!

Clar
111 *ppp*



116

S

S.2

A

T

B

Clar
116

DEO
GRA-
TIAS