

## **PROGRAM NOTE:**

*William Blake Rhapsody* embodies the struggle to find enduring love, joy, and faith amidst a broken world fraught with suffering. The seed for the work germinated in 2000, when my friend Dominique Ju-Young Lee commissioned a solo viola work based on Blake's poem "Eternity." Ju imagined reciting the poem for her audience, then rhapsodizing on it through her viola. For about two years, I improvised, sketched, made recordings, and occasionally told Ju: "I've got your piece; I only have to write it down."

However, as is often the case, the music took on a life of its own- first demanding a singer, then a cello, more poems, woodwinds, and more strings. Sometimes the counterpoint and structures required working out, but often, entire melodies or textures presented themselves, demanding inclusion and attention.

Only two weeks ago, I believed the work was finished, and was proofreading my final draft for the official world premiere at the New York Philharmonic's 2014 Biennial. However, as I was reading through "The Garden of Love" in my head, an invisible percussionist softly played a single

chime. Before I knew it, an integral percussion part emerged, as though it had always been there, waiting to be uncovered.

The work is entirely driven by Blake's text, which the singer presents, personifies, deconstructs, amplifies, and reflects. The musicians sometimes embody the imagery in the text: as literal depictions of birdsong or infants, as symbolic representations of Blake's theology and worldview, as malevolent or benevolent forces acting upon the soprano's personal Heaven or Hell. Various bells (chimes, glockenspiel, and Tibetan finger cymbals) interweave symbolically, at times underscoring Blake's indictment of twisted, legalistic religiosity; at others, hinting of joyous celebrations or offering wordless prayers.

Sunrises have always captivated me, and I can't help but compose music inspired by them. The interlude between the first and second songs emerges as a reflective, predawn meditation. The interlude connecting the second and third songs invokes Blake's intense and mystical realm, "Eternity's sunrise," where divine joy transcends human suffering.

Of course, Blake's poetry is never content to

remain ecstatic for long, and the final song finds the musicians wrestling with Blake's rhetorical questions about grief, pain, compassion, and whether God (or anyone) actually cares.

*William Blake Rhapsody* is dedicated to

. . . Jon Deak, who believed in me and the work from the beginning,

. . . Lucy Shelton, a dream collaborator who breathed fresh life into the score and

inspired many new melodies.

. . . Theodore Wiprud, who made the private and public premieres possible

. . . Dominique Ju-Young Lee, whose initial commission positively captivated me

. . . every soul who searches for genuine and enduring love, joy, and faith.

-David Wallace, New York City, May 14, 2014

## **William Blake Rhapsody Libretto**

### **1. The Garden of Love**

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen;  
A Chapel was build in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
and Thou shalt not, writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,  
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tombstones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

### **2. Eternity**

He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies

Lives in Eternity's sun rise

### **3. On Anothers Sorrow**

Can I see anothers woe,  
And not be in sorrow too  
Can I see anothers grief,  
And not seek for kind relief.

Can I see a falling tear.  
And not feel my sorrows share,  
Can a father see his child,  
Weep, nor be with sorrow fill'd.

Can a mother sit and hear.  
An infant groan an infant fear-  
No no never can it be.  
Never never can it be.

And can he who smiles on all  
Hear the wren with sorrows small,  
Hear the small birds grief & care  
Hear the woes that infants bear-

And not sit beside the nest  
Pouring pity in their breast  
And not sit the cradle near  
Weeping tear on infant tear.

And not sit both night & day,  
Wiping all our tears away,  
O! no never can it be.  
Never never can it be.

He doth give his joy to all,  
He becomes an infant small,  
He becomes a man of woe  
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not, thou canst sigh a sigh,  
And thy maker is not by  
Think not, thou canst weep a tear,  
And thy maker is not near.

O! he gives to us his joy.  
That our grief he may destroy  
Till our grief is fled & gone  
He doth sit by us and moan

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