

Huw Catchpole-Davies

Traversing the Centuries

For Soprano and Piano

Traversing the Centuries Preface

A recent excavation of Sumerian clay tablets inspired the text for this work. Anthony Goldhawk's understanding is that the Sumerians were some of the first people to write hymns to music some 5000 years ago. Anthony has intentionally incorporated two themes in the text exploring his thoughts about these discoveries and what they might suggest about humanity. The first theme questions whether, over time, we forget the very people that created today's world. The second incorporates the geological processes of weathering or the human processes of excavation, revealing what lies beneath the surface. Anthony describes both natural and human corrosive powers are capable of extremes of beauty and destruction. The text ends on a hopeful note, that even if we forget our ancestry, blanket the truth, corrupt beauty, and hide the past, it will always rise to the surface eventually.

In this work I attempted to explore the different viewpoints from which this poem could be read. The text discusses a view of historic construction from descendants' point of reference, perhaps suggesting a present existing in a 'now' time. However, the text also firmly acknowledges that a present 'now' existed in the past for our ancestors, though it lies obscured from the direct view of their descendants, us. The text suggests that although this history may lie obscured that it still exerts a direct influence on our lives whether we understand or accept this influence.

I intended to blend the discovery of the ancestral histories and the present world together throughout the work, in essence gradating between the narrative of the present and the narrative of the past. As the text was visually presented in four couplets separated by a paragraph these appeared as sedimentary layers, evoking the themes of excavation and erosion. Therefore I chose to build a work where the

musical framework repeated four times. The piece therefore has a varied strophic form and becomes more complex as we move towards the close. Each time this framework was to be repeated more and more music would be discovered ‘between’ the notes that existed in the previous section. Therefore, the work becomes more complex during the course of the piece and highlights the viewpoint (or narrative) from the present perspective at the opening (with notes obscured from audibility), and the viewpoint from the past perspective at the close (with all of the notes fully excavated). In other words, the detail of the piece is therefore excavated or eroded to the surface much like the poem suggests. A musical motif I intended to bring out was an accelerating crescendo which in this piece trills, mostly, on the interval of a third and is cross threaded and layered in the piano lines, also occasionally in the vocal line, throughout the piece. Further to adding more pitches and augmenting gestures in the musical lines, another technique was used in the vocal line where I augmented the syllables into sub-syllabic components. For example the single syllabled word ‘flesh’ becomes a two-syllabled word ‘fle-sh’ in the music.

I found great reward in writing the vocal line for *Traversing the Centuries*. Exploring the pure aspects, or rather constituents, of a single word brought about a discovery of more ways in which I could stretch and pressure particular sounds to enhance the narrative of the text. For example, the final word in the vocal part suggests a ghostly whisper from the ancestors spoken directly through the final sub-syllable of the narratively present singer.

Traversing the Centuries

by Anthony Goldhawk

The Ancients remain as the centuries pass
The Sumerian symbols engraved in our hearts

Fresh fallen powder alights the night sky
Souls whisper in the darkness never saying goodbye

Engulfing the clay the elements corrode
It begins with the skin, then the flesh, then the bone

Fresh fallen powder alights the night sky
But Souls whisper in the darkness, never saying goodbye

* - gracenote to be sung on the beat (b. 93)

§ - indicated vowel shape to change gradually through note (b. 124, b.125 etc.)

± - note to be sung one quarter flat (b. 104)

Dedicated to Sian Thomas

Traversing the Centuries

For Soprano and Piano

Text by
Anthony Goldhawk

Huw Catchpole-Davies (2010)

Ethereal ♩ = c. 92

rit. *p* **Meno mosso** ♩ = c. 86

The An-cients re - main__

pp *legato*

8

as the cen - tu - ries pass The Su - me - ri - an sym - bols__ en - graved__ in our

14 *f* **Tempo primo** ♩ = c. 92

hearts It be-gins with the skin, _____

(8)

mf *f* *mf* *p*

22 **Meno mosso** ♩ = c. 86

Fresh fall - en pow - der a -

mp

28 *mp* *mf* *p* SS

lights the night sky S - ouls _____

mf *mp* *mf*

34 *mf* *p* *mp*

whis - per in the dark - ness ne - ver say - ing good -

39 *mf* *f* **Tempo primo** ♩ = c. 92

bye - then the fle - - - sh

f *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *mp*

44

51 *mp* *mf* *mp*

instant
voul change
air through
nose
ng

E - n - gul - fi - ng the clay the

rit. **Meno mosso** ♩ = c. 86

instant
voul
change

eh nn tss

59 *mf* *f* *p*

tss

e - le - men - ts cor - rode, the e - le - me - n - ts cor - - rode

66 *ff*

It be - gins with the skin, with the skin,

70 *f* *mp*

then the fle - - - sh then

Primal ♩ = c. 92

74 *p* *mp*

the bone

mf *f*

81

86

ff

90

blow air through teeth *ff*

mf

F

Meno mosso ♩ = c. 86

93 *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

* instant vowel change
sim. eh nn

re - sh f - all e - n

101 *f* *p*

gradual vowel change
ah ah → oo

pow - der a - lights

107 *mf* *p* *f*

instant vowel change
ah ee

the night

113 *f*

ss ah

s - ky

molto rit. Molto Meno mosso ♩ = c. 56

120 ee

mf § (oo)----->(ee)

But s -

125 (oo) -----> (ee)

air through nose

nn eh (ee)

oul - s _____ whi - s - per in - (nn) _____ the dark - ne - ss _____

8^{va}

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

mf *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

129 --> (oo)

mp ah *mf* ee

instant change to a whisper

ne - ver (ss) - say - ing _____ good - bye. _____

(8)