

EDGAR WARREN WILLIAMS

WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

for percussion, mezzo-soprano, and violoncello

SCORE

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PROGRAM NOTES

"What the Thunder Said" is based upon the last nine lines of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

Coming at the end of this complex poem, these lines mirror the theme of cultural and psychological fragmentation of the post-World-War-I world. These line in four different languages each allude to themes developed in the body of the poem. The children's doggerel "London Bridge is falling down" moves directly to a quote from Dante's *Purgatorio* in which a doomed poet seeks to redeem himself in the "refining fires" of hell. Following that is a quote from the *Pervigilium Veneris*, a pre-Christian paean to Venus that alludes to the myth of Philomel. (Philomel and her sisters take vengeance on the man who raped her and tore out her tongue; when the rapist turns the tables and threatens to murder the avenging sisters, the gods take pity and turn all three sisters into swallows, freeing them from their tormentor and giving Philomel back her voice.) "When will I be turned into a swallow?" the line asks. Then a line from the poem "El Desdichado" [The Wretched One] by the proto-Symbolist poet Gérard de Nerval. "[I am] the Prince of Aquitaine of the demolished castle." Then, at last, Eliot suggests a purpose to this hodgepodge of quotes: "These fragment I have shored against my ruins." Then, as if in exasperation, a quote from Kidd's *The Spanish Tragedy*: "Why Ile fit you. Heironymo's mad againe." Heironymo has been driven mad by the murder of his son but, despite this, he swears to take care of ("fit") the murderers. Then comes what the thunder says. "Charity (datta), compassion (dayadhvam) and control (damyata)". "Shantih", as repeated here, marks the formal end of an Upanishad, meaning "peace be with you" and "amen".

The composer selected one more fragment from *The Waste Land* for this composition. The poem has the following epigraph in Greek and Latin:

"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σιβυλλα τι θελεις; respondebat illa: αποθανειν θελω."

[I have seen with my own eyes the Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her "What do you want?" She answered, "I want to die."]

The Sibyl of Cumae was a prophetess in service to Apollo and a great beauty. Apollo wished to take her as his lover and offered her anything she desired. She asked for eternal life. Apollo granted her wish. She lived for hundreds of years, each year becoming smaller and frailer, having received eternal life but not eternal youth. When Trimalchio speaks of her in the *Satyricon*, she is little more than a tourist attraction, tiny, ancient, confined, and longing to die. The percussionists asks this question of the mezzo/cellist at the beginning of the work: Sibyl, what do you want? The cellist responds, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" Again, at the end of the work, the percussionist asks her the same question. This time she answers with an angry outburst in the form of a short, ugly cadenza. Then, calming, she responds, "Shantih."

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

GENERAL

The cellist/mezz takes on the persona of the Sibyl. She responds to the percussionist operatically. The notion is that there is a progression through the quotes that leads her to a more measured, philosophical request at the end, asking not for death, but for peace. Her cadenza at the end is merely a final outburst of frustration and bitterness before her quiet request for “Shantih.”

m. 3: The mezzo’s “Shall I at least set my land in order” should be understood as an exasperated, out-of-patient response to the percussionist’s question—as if he has asked that questions a million times.

m. 80: The outburst of the drums should be performed with enough panache to appear as an incitement to the mezzo—to which she responds, “Why Ile fit you!.” What follows should appear as a duel between the percussionist and cellist (in the persona of the Sibyl).

m.108: The percussionist should be understood to be referring to the cellist/mezzo/Sibyl.

VIOLONCELLO



Indicates saltato/jeté, or a controlled off-the-string staccato on a single bow



Indicates the same—all on one bow.



Indicates ricochet/jeté, a throwing of the bow to create an indefinite number of progressively softer attacks.

PERCUSSION

Most of the percussion instruments use noteheads specific to the instrument. This is simply to aid the percussionist in parsing the score. Vibraphone pedaling is left up to the performer except in certain ambiguous cases where it is explicitly indicated in the score.

Duration: ca. 7 min.

Written for DUOroborus (Dagmar Bathman, cello/mezzo; Omar Cecchi, percussion)

WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

EDGAR WARREN WILLIAMS
2019

Percussion
BLK. ① C.BELL ⑤① BLK. DRM ⑤⑥
mf
Speaking: questioning Mz.

Mezzo
♩ = 84
f See - byl - la tee te - le - ee?
Speaking: *f* con esasperaz.
Shall I at least set my land in or - der?

Violoncello
pizz. *f*
Mz. looks at percussionist
arco *f* con esasperaz.
* full bow

VIB
f

VLC
pizz. *sfz* arco *sfz* pizz. *f* arco *mf*

VIB
9 *sfz* *fp* *f* *ff* *sfz* [damp]

VLC
9 *mf* *ben marc..* *f* *sfz* *pp* senza vibrato

12 Più veloce ♩ = 96
TGL ① accel. C.BELL ⑤④①① ③② ⑤ DRM
BLK. ③⑤
motor: fast *mp* *mf* *sfz* *ff* *sfz* *fp*

MEZ
Più veloce ♩ = 96 *mp* accel. *ff*
Lon - don bridge is fal - ling down fal - ling down fal - ling down

VLC
12 *sfz* *f* *f*
behind pont. (pizz.) knuckle on shoulder

18 *Più lento* ♩ = 72 **TAM-T** ② ①

VIB *ff* *pp* **BOWLS** wrong end of vib sticks *mf* *mp*

MEZ *f* *ben marc..* fal - ling down fal - ling down fal - ling

VLC *sfz* *arco* *mp giacoso*

squeak: rub palm on upper bout beside fingerboard

22 *Più lento* ♩ = 48 **DRM** ② ① ②

VIB (BOWLS) VIB *motor: fast* (correct end of stick!) *p*

MEZ *f* *f* *Più lento* ♩ = 48 *p* fal - ling fal - ling down Poi s'as - co - sa nel fo - co

VLC *f* *pp*

26 (DRM) *p sempre* *p sempre* poco a poco crescendo [MEZ]

MEZ nel fo - co che gli af - fi - na che gli a - fi - na af - fi - na nel

VLC *pp sempre*

31 (DRM) *(p)* *mf* *pp* *dim.* *pp*

MEZ fo - co nel fo - co af - fi - na Poi s'a - co - sa nel fo - co

VLC *pp* *ff* *pp sub*

WILLIAMS: *What the Thunder Said*

6

37 (DRM)

accel.

CYM ①

[choke] W-CHMS

Più veloce ♩ = 72

VIB

MEZ

VLC

37

f espress. *f* *p* sub.

acc. TGL VIB 3 *mp*

acc. *mp* Più veloce ♩ = 72

affrettare... ten. sim. Swal - low 0

42

DRM

VIB

MEZ

VLC

42

mf *f* *p* *mf* *pp*

swal - low collé* Quan - do Quan - do fi - am ceu che - li don

collé* ord. V collé

3 5 3 3 3

mp stacc. *Red.*

* collé = "bowed pizzicato" Very short stroke, with bow lightly contacting string with a distinct, short, sharp pinch

46

BLK. ⑤

Più veloce ♩ = 96

VIB

MEZ

VLC

46

mp *mp*

Quan - do fi - am u - ti che - li - don Che - li - don

flaut. V ord. 0

3 3 3 3 5 5

mp *mp*

52

VIB motor: off

stacc. sempre

VIB

VLC

52

pp *p* *mp* *pp* *mf*

p 5 *mf* *sfz* *pp* *mf*

grat. pont ord. pizz.

3 3 3

57

VIB *mp* *f* *mf* *pp* *p* *stacc.* *mp* *pp*

MEZ [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [i] [ai] [m]

VLC (pizz.) *p* *f* *p* *pp* ord.

60

VIB *mp* *pp* *ff* *mf*

MEZ *p* *pp* *ff* *rall. poco a poco* *pp*

VLC *mp* *ff* *pp* *Glissando*

C. BELL BLK. DRM ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ to BLK.

ff *Set up in an artificial harmonic position as high as possible then slide down to nut without altering the shape of the hand Use whichever string produces the noisiest result. *pp*

64 BLK. CYM TAM-T ① Più lento ♩ = 66 TGL

VIB *p* *mf* *mp* *mf* *p*

MEZ Più lento ♩ = 66 *mp* La Prince d' A-qui-taine a la tour a - bo - lis a - bo - lis la tour

VLC

71

VIB *mf* *molto* *p* *mp* *pp* *3*

MEZ *rall.* Più lento ♩ = 48 *mf* Speaking: conversationally, to the audience a - bo - lis These frag - ments I have

VLC *mf* *f* *sonoro* *pizz. molto vibr.* *arco* *espress.* *p*

77 (CYM)
①

accl. DRM ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ① ② ⑥ ⑤ ③ ④ **Più veloce** ♩ = 84

VIB *mf* *mp* *p* *ff*

VIB *mf* *mp* *p* *ff*

MEZ *mp* *pp* *accl.* *angry, shouting* (at percussionist) *f*

shored a - gainst my ru - in a - bo - lie ru - in Why then

VLC *pp*

77

83

DRM ③ ⑥ ③ ⑤ ⑥ ④ ③ ⑥ ③ ④ ② ① C.BELL ⑤ ② ④ ③ ⑤ ① ⑥ ⑤ ③

MEZ *ff* *ff brutale* *mf* *p* *mf* *p sub.* *mf*

He fit you!

VLC *ff* *ff brutale* *mf* *p* *mf* *p sub.* *mf*

83

90

C.BELL ② ③ ③ ① ④ ⑤ ② ③ ① ⑥ ② ③ ① ② ④ ⑤ BLK. ③ ② DRM ②

VLC *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *f sub* *mf* *pp* *mf*

pizz. *(pizz.)* *arco* *pizz.* *arco* *mf* *ff*

90

97

C.BELL ④ ⑥ ② ① ① ④ ③ ② ③ ④ ③ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ⑥

VLC *mf* *mf* *mf* *pp* *ff*

97

103 **DRM** **C.BELL** **CYM**

f *molto* *f* 3 7 *p* *f* 5

VLC 103 *p* *ff* *f* 3 *ff* *p sub.* *f*

109 Speaking: **TAM-T** **TAM-T**

f *Più lento* ♩ = 66 *f* *mp*

Heir - on - y - mo's mad a - gain!

VLC 109 *ff* *ord.* *ord.* → pont *pp*

* "circular bow": bow moving in a continuous, circular motion between fingerboard and bridge

115 **VIB** **MEZ** **VLC**

affrettare, rubato *ben marc..* *ff* *f* *red.* *[damp]*

Da - ta Da - yadh - vam

119 **TAM-T** **DRM**

mp *f* *f* *f* *f*

Dam - ya - ta Dam - yadh - vam Dam - ya - ta Da - ta

124 \lceil 3 \rceil ④ TAM-T ② *Più lento* ♩ = 48

VIB *mp* *Red.* *mp* *f* *pp* BOWLS ten. wood beater ----- to VIB

MEZ *mp* *f* *Più lento* ♩ = 48

VLC Da ta pizz. arco *mp* *pp*

131 H.CYM. ① ③ ② accel. subito a tempo (♩=48)

VIB *pp* *Red.* *mp* ① ② *p* i.v. sempre *mf* *Red.* *p*³ i.v. *subito a tempo* (♩=48)

MEZ *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *accel.* *mf* *p sub.*

VLC *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *Shan - tih* *affrettato* ③ *p* poco a poco più intensa *mf* *pp*

137 W-CHMS TGL ② ① TAM-T ② *I.v. sempre* -----

VIB *f* *pp* BOWLS wood beater *p* *I.v. sempre* Speaking: questioning Mz. See - byl - la tee te - le - ee?

MEZ *[u]* *Mz. looks at percussionist* *Mz. looks back to her music*

VLC *pp*

Vlc. "cadenza"*
[ca.10 seconds]

* Improvise upon the 3-string fragments given. Perform in any order or configuration – arco, pizz., col leg., pont. etc.; short motives, double-stops, triple stops, or isolated notes. Should be **sempre fortissimo** and **ben marcato**. The effect should be of a virtuosic, angry, fragmentary, and demented outburst – but **no longer than 10 seconds**. Percussionist maintains pianissimo tam-tam underneath cadenza. The improvisation leads directly into the repeated quadruple-stops in measure 143, the cellist cuing the percussionist for his cymbal roll. The *fermata* that ends measure 143 must be long enough to allow the cymbal to decay sufficiently for the singing bowl in m.144 to be heard. During this long *fermata*, the cellist should simply stare at the floor, seemingly exhausted. However, the percussionist must show in his attitude that the piece is not over.

[N.B. The composer has provided a possible realization at the end of the score. This may be cut out and pasted over the above graphic if the cellist prefers not to improvise her own cadenza.]

143 In tempo ♩ = 72 **CYM** ① i.v. sempre **Lo stesso tempo**

VIB *f* **BOWLS** ① ten. wood beater *p* i.v. sempre **Lo stesso tempo**

VLC 143 *sfz* con brio sim. *pp* sub *ord.*

146 **VIB** TAM-T DRM ① ② ① ③ ② ① ③^②① ③ ② ① ③ *p* i.v. sempre *mp* *pp*

MEZ *p* **poco a poco rall. al fine** Shan ti

VLC 146 **poco a poco rall. al fine**

Musicians remain in last playing position until metalophones decay

Possible realization of Vlc. cadenza:

Presto (*fermati: brève*) to m. 143

VLC

The musical score is written on a single staff in bass clef. It begins at measure 144 with the instruction 'arco' and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents. There are several dynamic shifts to *sfz* throughout the piece. The score includes various performance instructions: 'arco' (multiple times), 'pizz.' (pizzicato), and 'grat.' (gratto). The piece concludes with a fermata over the final notes, which are marked with a dynamic of *ff*. The tempo is marked 'Presto' and the performance is to be 'fermati: brève'.