THE WOUND IN THE WATER

Libretto by: EUAN TAIT.

Music by: KIM ANDRE ARNESEN
Synopsis:
The Wound in the Water - a choral symphony

This new choral symphony, for solo soprano, chorus, strings and harp, explores the theme of Mammon by singing of our exile and the wounding of our world, of the beauty of the earth, and of the struggle of profoundly divided humanity towards a shared song. Mammon, the traditional symbol of the love of greed and money, is a force that divides us, both internally – we become divided from ourselves, from our capacity for love - and communally – human beings become creatures of competition and conflict. Our relationships with ourselves, others, and the vividly living planet that is our home, slowly erodes and then collapses – and we come to live as homeless exiles in this threefold sense. So this symphony recognises the long journey towards healing that we have to undergo, and ends with a fragile attempt at a shared song.

The symphony is in three parts, each part consisting of a series of shorter movements.

Part 1  The cry of the sea
As the symphony opens, we hear the theme of the “broken song” for the first time, emerging from the seascape of the orchestra. The Chorus cry out the human dilemma, the Mammon forces of broken desire that we struggle with every day, that have already damaged our human and global ecology. The Pilgrim (solo soprano) walks alongside the restless sea, as she has done every day of her life. She knows and loves this place, the fierce fiery presence of its waves and sky, but in recent years she has heard its music change, and develop into a terrible, endless cry, like the cry of a wounded animal in pain. She sees her child dance among the waves, but is conscious of her own broken life, that the way she lives her life has somehow broken her connection with the beloved world that surrounds her, and she feels is if she is being forced into exile. From far off, come cries of the chorus, mixing with the orchestra’s cries of the broken song, the “wounded sea”.

In a choral interlude, as the Pilgrim departs, distant voices plead for all exiles.

Part 2  The cries of exile – chorus of the dispossessed.
In the first poem, the Pilgrim, experiencing a sense of exile, sings as all the lost and the exiled of our times sing: what she knew and loved has vanished, and she crosses the sea to an unknown destination, remembered voices of family and friends calling their broken song all around her. In the next section, the Pilgrim sings of a sunken exiles’ boat and those lost with it. In the third poem, the Pilgrim imagines the exiled
stranger among us, their pain and disorientation. In the final poem of Part 2, the Pilgrim returns to the utterly changed seashore she once loved, with nothing familiar, not the seasons, not the sea: the Pilgrim will only find her home “through a broken song…shattered music.”

A choral interlude hints at the horrors the exiles have left behind.

**Part 3 The heart of the singer**

The whole symphony has energised by a recognition of our exiled state, and in this movement, the search for a way out of exile, for a shared song, a sense that the shared song of humanity, its relationship with itself and its home has been broken by Mammon. In Part 3, in three short movements, the Pilgrim and the chorus, in celebrating music and the life-dance of our common global home, explore the theme of searching for that elusive shared song. Part 3 starts with the chorus of exiles, awed at the powerful landscape around them, sky, water, earth; in the central poem of Part 3, a shared song begins to emerge; in the final poem, the music erupts again, but this time into a fierce, liberating laughter.

An Epilogue ends the Symphony with a final plea: may love know us. May we be known by love.

**Part 1: The cry of the sea**

*i. Mammon in the mind’s ocean*

In the depths of our human ocean
under the immense pressure
of the mind’s suppressing waters,
desire, our own private Mammon,
what we think we want, stirs in us,
the broken creature of our lives roars,
and with its bellow tears the waters
and leaves them wounded, poisoned.

I call to you, like a creature
caught in a nylon net,
and you call back: “What
is your name, what
is my name?” All night,
we sing to each other
as creatures of our minds,

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we ululate, weep, whisper
across miles of damaged ocean
this mourning call, that you too,
all of you, know well: it sounds
with the agonised cry
of our wounded seas,
while our minds reel
with broken desire.

O sweet sister sea,
O damaged one,
O harm in ourselves,
We, children of Mammon.

ii. The wound in the waters
The same rivers sing,
the same seas dance;
we’re shaken by the same storms
as those we love;

yet from the glittering waters
from the rich soils
our naked feet touch
comes the same
terrible high cry
like a bird caught in flight
by the white heat
of the mammon-heart arrow

as if the light itself
is draining from the dance
of the water, as if light,

we are the archer.

iii. The song of the sea
I have walked this shore
all my life; my children leap
among the waves

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like a spray of fire,
and always I listen:
I'll know any change
in their voices, I'll hear
any hidden sound
of their anguish or fear,
and in the last years
I have been shocked
into silence here:
the song of this sea
is changing, its music
slowly unfamiliar,
the song becoming a cry,
like a vast creature
with a visceral wound.
The storm wind is howl.
I am no longer home,
I'm being led away
like a captive of myself,
like a sudden stranger,
like an exile.

Interlude 1:
Chorus
Spirit, help us to hear
their cries like a coming storm
surging across the waters,
from boats packed with fear.

Part 2: The cries of exile

i. Song of sea exile
I, the exile,
my heart burning,
my lost life
a terrible fire,
songs of loved ones
crying all around me.
Oh endless,
endless home, the sea.

Oh my missing,
I am listening,
yet your silence
cannot answer me.
There, we left
our singing unfinished,
and our lives now
fall into the endless sea.

This the broken
gift of love:
the exile calls,
remembered names.
What you were
scorched on me,
your wounded names
sung to the endless sea.

Waves like voices
roar around you:
we’re not silenced,
but cry out like the sea.
Your anger,
fiery, living
is like love
that bleeds
like the endless sea.

Oh our exile,
torn by love,
singing words
you can no longer sing,
where’s the shores,
the harbour, the horizon,
wanderer,
calling to the endless sea
calling to the endless sea?

ii. The shadow of the boat
The shadow of the boat
through the bright beauty
of the exiles’ clear water.

The body of the boat
and the voices streaming,
terrified, into the sea.

The quiet harbour,
the vacated houses,
and the trail of voices

 evaporating, who cried
to the boat, carry me,
bear me like a child,

reborn, to another shore.

iii. The strangers
They, the strangers who walk among us,
carrying their imagined unborn
child in their minds;

They, the strangers who came to us
guessing, full of troubled beliefs,
meet the unexpected hiss.

They, the strangers none of us
have named, whom we do not know,
whose lives seem utterly closed to us.

iv. The song of love
I return again to the burning sea,
again to the sea alive with sunlight,
the fire water teeming
with the voices that travel to me

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light-fast through the deep, 
drowning voices, 
voices seeking home.

Victims of mammon, 
victims of my desire 
that erupts as all our wars, 
wars that send our hearts, 
our whole being, 
into permanent exile.

Here is the seashore 
I once knew, now 
unknown to me: 
the air howls 
with the cries of the estranged:

what is the sea? What now 
are the seasons? 
Where will we go 
to be at home 
as the ground melts 
under our feet? 
Where will we go 
to heal our broken song? 
Where be at home 
except in a shattered music?

Interlude 2: 
Chorus: 
Spirit, help me to see 
their broken stories 
behind their eyes: a chair 
overturned, the faint smear 
of a last shared meal 
in their abandoned room.

Part 3: The Heart of the Singer

i. The singer’s dance. 
The leaves have fallen away, and dance

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to the wind-song in the garden,

and through new naked trees, we see the two great rivers in their beauty

and restless power. The driven clouds burn like comets in our aerial ocean,

the air is alight with the cries of birds flocking southwards like the music

once exiled from the heart, yet our hearts erupt and here, on this wind-driven hill

we are drawn to the centre of the dance, and we know we are helplessly singing,

seeking whatever in us we cannot stop, the song ceaseless, leaping, our utter yes.

\textit{ii. The singer’s voice}

It is always there, sounding, circling in us; we reach in

to draw it out, and find it a familiar, hidden friend:

our shared song, its threads woven from steel

made gossamer, light as laughter, tensile,

strongly invisible, present in the love

we attempt, in what we seek to unfold

in each others’ lives

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as students, friends,

in these singing,
unfinished days.

In our life—yes, our beings
sing from their depths;

and from our own lives
comes our answer of thanks,

and our one song wings
into the falling, still fire

of the bright snow, slowly
turning our streets
to a deep and fragile peace.

iii. Sea-singer
It is not you alone, sea-singer,
in the end, your voice fizzing
into the oncoming waves,

but it is the grain of your voice
like a choral thread in the rock
linking you song to song,

and we are gathering, all of us,
choir, at the Tromsø shore:
Arctic church, Hovig’s spine, bucks

like a horse-herd of mountains,
and among us all, a singing laughter
erupts like an unbroken sea.

Epilogue:

Chorus
Spirit, the cry has erupted
and now falls away
into the silence

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of the seeking deaths
in the warm, bright waters.
Love, have mercy.
Love, say we knew you.
Love, that you knew us.

Euan Tait, Cas-Gwent, Gwent, Cymru, August 2015.