

A COMPOSER'S DREAM

NOTES ON WRITING MUSIC FOR

THE INFERNO OF DANTE

di Bruce Saylor

Our life's journey bristles with sounds.
Sounds of silence.
Sounds of loneliness.
Phantoms of unvoiced, ill-formed fears.
Deafening, hushed interior ringing in the ears.
Mute terror, careering, pounding, roaring though the body.

Sounds of the journey.
The crackle of brush.
The even procession along strange paths.
Dread for the known and the unknown,
as in a dream,
coagulated groans erupt:
«Living man or shade, Have pity!»

As the journey begins
the creator implores the powers of heaven to inspire:
«O Muse, O genius of art, O memory...»
Music without sound translates into

shapes on the silent pentagram,
appears as a hologram of silent words
sung into notes on the string,
transparent, seen, then heard.

A composer's dream:
To have music handed him by the creator of words.
Dante's Hell: a composer's heaven.
Atmospheres of day and night.
Nature's noises, humanity's hum and moan.
Infernal fires and stars of heaven.
The music of the spheres.

Translated words of il miglior fabbro –
From Dante to Pinsky,
through visions of Scanlan,
newly sung by Morgenstern –
Realize
A composer's dream.

The opening music on the page refers to Robert Pinsky's Canto I, ll. 2-5 : «To tell / about those woods is hard - so tangled and rough/ And savage that thinking of it now, I feel/ The old fear stirring: death is hardly more bitter.» This snippet of the very opening music of the suite is quiet, but terror-ridden with its agitated tremolos, embodying at once the unsettling chromatic intervals associated with my *Dante Theme*, and the almost palpable fear coursing through the artist's body. This leads immediately to Dante's invocation in Canto II, ll. 6-9: «O Muses, O genius of art, O memory whose merit // Has inscribed inwardly those things I saw - / Help me fulfill the perfection of your nature.» Dante's words are an emotional outpouring, almost song-like, imploring the ancient gods of the arts for the inspiration to tackle such a difficult task. That spontaneous invocation summoned for me song-like, hyper-emotional, deliberately tonal musical phrases. These are but two examples of my 'translations' of Dante/Pinsky into music. My written notes refer autobiographically and in a general way to the ease with which I was able to respond musically to the dramatic/poetic situations posed by the two poets, together with the guidance of director Robert Scanlan and the interpretive brilliance of violinist Gil Morgenstern.

Bruce Saylor ha studiato alla Juilliard School di New York e all'Accademia di Santa Cecilia a Roma. Ha composto sinfonie, concerti, musica da camera e canzoni, spesso commissionati e eseguiti da orchestre e ensemble di rilievo a festival musicali in ogni parte del mondo. Fra le sue composizioni, cui sono andati prestigiosi riconoscimenti, si ricorda *Orpheus Descending*, ispirata al testo teatrale di Tennessee Williams, due pezzi corali in occasione della visita di Papa Giovanni Paolo II a New York nel 1995, musiche per due CD di Jessye Norman e *Dante's Suite for Solo Violin*, ispirata all'*Inferno* di Dante tradotto da Robert Pinsky e eseguita da Gil Morgenstern. Insegna composizione musicale al Queens College della City University di New York.

Gil Morgenstern, violinista statunitense, ha compiuto i suoi studi musicali alla Juilliard School di New York. Ha suonato in tutto il mondo e ha partecipato a numerosi programmi radiofonici e televisivi; i suoi concerti possono essere ascoltati alla National Public Radio. È co-fondatore e condirettore del *9 Circles Chamber Theatre*, un'organizzazione dedicata a performance interdisciplinari, in particolare alla relazione fra parola e musica. È direttore e violinista dell'ensemble *Broyhill Chamber*, specializzato in concerti di musica classica, romantica e contemporanea con strumentazione mista.

Dante's Violin

(Suite from The Inferno)

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"The dark wood" Lento (♩ = 60)

Violin

ff \rightarrow *p*

90

cresc. molto

3 3

"O Muse"

appass.

9:4

f

3 3

100

dim.

p

105

pp \rightarrow *mp*

110

p

8va