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Le Point Vierge (2021)

A Simple Monk and an American Lama

Three movements for two voices (one high/one low) and piano

Text and Setting

Characters: Neither shall be defined, but both should be 'implied' ...

A Simple Monk (aka. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet): Lower Voice

Placing the 'Simple Monk' as a Bass voice is representative of the primary vocal in Tibetan Ritual Music – The Bass Chant (inflected monotone, recto-tono recitation). When asked, the Dalai Lama has often described himself as 'just a simple monk'.

Contemporary dress: Deep plum/maroon and gold/orange with a maroon or gold belt and multiple wrist beads hiding an expensive looking watch. Perhaps a Burnley FC Top? A T-shirt with 'a message'? Consider holding Mala beads (Buddhist prayer beads). Could also carry a copy of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

An American Lama (aka. Thomas Merton - Trappist Monk and Poet): Upper Voice

Setting Merton in the countertenor range alludes to the historical practice of castrati and the Western predilection of placing the melody in the upper line. Merton was referred to as 'The Jesus Lama' by the Tibetan monks during his visit to Dharamsala.

Contemporary dress: Black and white with a black belt, a cross and rosary beads. The cross could be worn as jewellery, or could be on the T-shirt. Maybe wear a Newcastle FC shirt. Could also include a denim jacket and carry a little black book (Psalter), or perhaps a book of Merton's poems. The characters could swap beads and books during the performance.

Vocal Ranges:

The work is composed for two voice soloists; one high and one low.

Preferably, as the two 'implied' characters are gender specific, the high voice would be performed by a countertenor who can sing a passing F4 (bars 44 and 52).

The low voice requires a bass vocalist who can sing a passing F3 (bar 110), or (preferably) a baritone who can sing a passing F1 (bars 8 and 16).

Although the 'implied' characters are gender specific, one can see no reason why the upper voice could not be sung by a female alto or mezzo-soprano.

Lower Voice:

F1 - F3 (middle C = C3): Ideally a baritone who can sing a passing F1 in bars 8 and 16.

Upper Voice:

B^b2 - F4: Ideally a countertenor who can sing a passing F4 in bars 44 and 52.

Scene:

Thomas Merton's three meetings with Gelong Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet in the mountains of Dharamsala on 4th, 6th and 8th November, 1968.

Song One

The Grass is Always Greener

For lower voice and piano

A Simple Monk: (lower voice)

In Time

Out Time

Dark Clouds

Sunrise

Half Day

Half Night

Stained Hearts (from the) torchlight

And so he said what will, will be ...

They stood on the rocks that wake before you

Adore you

All the raging sands

The sloping seas

Half a world away

And so he cried Lost Angeles

They stood on the rocks that melt before you

Adore you

All the burning hands

The builds they dream

And the angels shine

For all to see

The rocks and sands

Half a world away

And the angels shine

For all to see

The rocks and sands

(Float) on a Summa breeze

The rocks and sands

Half a world away

Half a world away

Half a mile away

Half a yard away

Song Two

Get Up Early in the Morning

For upper voice and piano

An American Lama: (upper voice)

Try to get up early in the morning
Try to get up early in the evening
Feed your soul

Try to get up early in the morning
Try to get up early in the evening
Tend the Garden

Tend the Garden
... and watch as the three rocks grow ...
Goodnight old friend
We still tried

Old friend
Tend the Garden
... and watch as the three rocks grow ...

Ceilings filled with cracks, but the cracks let warm light in

“The garden was a familiar image to monks, for they believed their central quest was to cultivate a holy space, an Edenic garden (*hortus claustralis*) where a flourishing worship of God could take place naturally.”¹

¹ David Torevell (discussing Merton’s *Elegy for a Trappist*), *Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle, 2021, p. 113

Song Three

A Lullaby for the Masses

For two voices (one high/one low) and piano

An American Lama: (upper voice)

Through the breeze we hear the songs of shadows

A personal song for personal souls

To walk the roads of history

Through the breeze we hear the sounds of laughing

They seep through the air

All our schemes

All our thoughts

Have you seen the way to Shambhala?

Hold tight.

Hold tight the waking dreams that haunt you

Do you know the way?

Have you seen the way?

Shambhala

A Simple Monk: (lower voice)

Songs sung for personal souls

Weep for the lords of history

Hear the sounds of laughing

All our schemes

All our thoughts

Have you seen the way to Shambhala?

Hold tight.

Hold tight the waking dreams that haunt you

Do you know the way?

Have you seen the way to Shambhala?

Shambhala

As HH The Dalai Lama noted during the 1985 Kalachakra initiation in Bodhgaya, Shambhala is not an ordinary country:

“Although those with special affiliation may actually be able to go there through their karmic connection, nevertheless it is not a physical place that we can actually find. We can only say that it is a pure land, a pure land in the human realm. And unless one has the merit and the actual karmic association, one cannot actually arrive there.”

Contact:

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