THE CROSSING

DONALD NALLY

ZEALOT CANTICLES

LANSING MCLOSKEY

ZEALOT CANTICLES (2017)
An oratorio for tolerance

LANSING MCLOSKEY
on writings of Wole Soyinka

The Crossing
Donald Nally

Doris Hall-Gulati, clarinet
Rebecca Harris, violin
Mandy Wolman, violin
Lorenzo Raval, viola
Arlen Hlusko, cello

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LANSING MCLOSKEY / ZEALOT CANTICLES
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Doris Hall-Gulati, clarinet
Rebecca Harris, violin
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Lorenzo Raval, viola
Arlen Hlusko, cello

Artwork by Steven Bradshaw

The Journey to Zealot Canticles

By Lansing McLoskey (b. 1964)

The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny.
- Wole Soyinka, Dec. 14th, 1971

Wole Soyinka (b. 1934) is a Nigerian poet, playwright, novelist, and recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1967 Soyinka was arrested and imprisoned for "civil defiance." His crimes? Denouncing the suppression of human rights and free speech by the military dictatorship of General Yakubu Gowon, intervening in an attempt to avoid the Nigerian/Biafran civil war, and condemning the genocide of the Igbo people. In the decades following his release, Soyinka has remained an outspoken advocate for human rights.

During his two years in prison, Soyinka spent several stints in solitary confinement and went on a number of hunger strikes; some near fatal. He chronicled his imprisonment in the book *The Man Died*, much of which was written in secret between the lines of books smuggled in by friends and sympathetic jailers, and on scraps of paper hidden in the cracks in his cell, with a stolen pen, then with ingeniously homemade ink and hand-crafted writing utensils.

In addition to the obvious physical effect of extreme fasts, there are the psychological and mental consequences. Soyinka writes of "achieving true weightlessness…blown about by the lightest breeze, by the lightest lyrical thought or metaphor" and describes spells of delirium, hallucination, but also trance-like states and unparalleled lucidity. Near the end of his imprisonment (thus the end of the book), the three-part phrase "I need nothing. I feel nothing. I desire nothing." becomes a repeated refrain; a mantra, if you will. The phrase is both an internal safe-haven for Soyinka's mind as well as a defiant response to his interrogators.

In 2002 Soyinka published a set of poems titled "Twelve Canticles for the Zealot"; a strangely beautiful and terrifying look into the mind of fanatics, containing a subtle catalogue of the horrific results, past and present. Throughout the set of canticles Soyinka makes universal pleas for peace from multiple languages and religious cultures. Seven of these poems form the core of the libretto of *Zealot Canticles*.

Interwoven with these poems are excerpts from *The Man Died*, his play *Madmen and Specialists*, and interviews, lectures, and speeches given by Wole Soyinka, reflecting on his upbringing in an environment of tolerance, and condemning the current climate of intolerance, bigotry, and violence.

From the opening poem I couldn't help but reflect upon the parallels between the delirium of the religious fanatic and the delirium of Soyinka himself during hunger fasts. Self-deprivation and hallucinations are not the sole prerogatives of the unjustly imprisoned, after all, but also common among zealots of another sort. Visions of God are hailed in prophets and scripture, but wielded as weapons by radicals and the demented. Soyinka's own renunciations of self ("I need/feel/desire nothing.") are renunciations and exhortations echoed in ultra-devotees from Buddhist monks and Hindu ascetics to Christian hermits and the Taliban.

Is there then not a thin line between extreme devotion – zealotry – and radicalism? And that line is both personal and public. One zealot preaches against the errors of a different faith, another spews hatred towards those who hold that faith. One extols devotion, the other breeds divisiveness. We only have to turn on the television to see how small the step can be from self-righteousness to political/social oppression or roadside bombs.

But it's not just roadside bombs we have to worry about. I was composing this piece during what was the most distressing U.S. presidential campaign in modern history, when every day we were faced with words of divisiveness, demeaning, mocking and degrading "the other," and images of our fellow citizens, red-faced with both rage and glee, shouting for the removal – even killing – of those of a different faith or ethnicity, while openly waving racist banners. Alarmingly casual suggestions to "knock the crap out of" those with whom they disagreed were not just empty rhetoric, and we watched with horror the footage of people punched, kicked, and beaten up.

And just as I was about to start composing the final movement, the election took place. Hate crimes in our own country immediately surged in the aftermath. I was shaken to the core. The words of Wole Soyinka were not just generalizations or universal in nature, but specifically about us. Right here, right now.
Zealot Canticles was commissioned by Donald Nally and The Crossing, with generous support from The Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University, and the University of Miami. I'd like to express my gratitude to Donald and The Crossing for their devotion to music as a living and always-relevant art form.

To read more about *Zealot Canticles*, including essays by Donald Nally,
visit *www.crossingchoir.org/zealot-canticles*

Texts

I. RENUNCIATION (PRELUDIUM)
Canticle I.
SATB

He wakes from a prolonged delirium, swears
He has seen the face of God.
God help all those whose fever never raged
Or has subsided.

I need nothing.
I feel nothing.
I desire nothing.

II. LET'S START
Soprano, Baritone

Let's start right at the very beginning. What were the circumstances of your birth, your early upbringing?

Wole Soyinka: I was born into a Christian household, in a parsonage in fact, so I grew up in sort of a missionary atmosphere but it was an environment which involved both the traditional religions as well as the Muslim religion, so we were exposed to all the various facets of faith, micro cultures which existed within those beliefs, and even though I've lost whatever Christian faith was drummed into me as a child, I still maintain very good relationship with all the various religions.

III. PERCHED ON CHURCH STEEPLE
Canticle II.
SATB

Perched on church steeple, minaret, cupola
Smug as misericords, gleeful as gargoyles
On gables of piety, the vampire acolyte
Waits to leap from private hell
To all four compass points—but will not voyage alone.
His variant on the doctored coin reads: Come with me or—
Go to—hell!

IV. I INTEND TO BE BLUNT
Baritone

Today's event may yet make a Christian out of me — since, from my admittedly imperfect recollection of the Christian bible — somewhere, it is written: to him who hath, even more shall be given. Today, I am setting aside all objections. I intend to be blunt. When you live in an environment of the progressive insemination of fear as an agency of faith, it is no time for palliatives of speech and timorous euphemisms. As the poet Langston Hughes, a product of generations of intolerance, observes in one of his poems: "There is no lavender word for 'lynch'."

V. I SHALL RAM PEBBLES IN MY MOUTH
Men

I shall ram pebbles in my mouth
Demosthenes
Not to choke, but half dolphin, half
Shark hammerhead from fathoms deep
Ride the waves to charge the breakers
They erect,
Crush impediments of power and inundate
Their tainted towers —
I shall ram pebbles in my mouth.

VI. ARMED WITH BOOK AND BEARD
Canticles VI. & XII.
SATB

It was his own kind, nailed
Yitzak Rabin to crossroads of the Orient
Arms extended to the Heights
Of peace. Across the Suez, the ghost
Of his precursor on the viewing stand
Watched the grim replay of a familiar reel.
The cleric swears he'll sweep the streets clean
Of the unclean, armed with Book and Beard. Both
Turn kindling, but overturn the law of physics.
For the fire consumes all but the arsonist.

VII. THE WRITING ON THE WALL
Soprano and Mezzo-soprano

The writing on the wall is no longer a mere biblical metaphor, it refers graphically today to the spattered graffiti of blood on the walls of our homesteads, schools, offices, sanctuaries of worship and children's nurseries. That writing is the universal language of nations, on the road to perdition.

Permit me to recall an exercise in a minor key

did we fail to learn,
that guns and boots
are not essential to
a coup d'etat?

VIII. I SHALL PLACE NETTLES ON MY TONGUE
Women

I shall place nettles on my tongue
Demosthenes
Then thwart its stung retraction. Oh,
Let it burn at root and roof
Let rashes break from every pore
Just so it sear the tyrant´s power
With one discharge
I shall place nettles on my tongue.

IX. SEEK HAVENS OF PEACE ON OCEAN FLOORS
Canticle IX.
Mezzo-soprano, Baritone, SATB

The meek shall inherit the earth ...
Blessed are the peacemakers ...
Shalom ... Shalom ... Shalom ...
Irosu wonrin, irosu wonrin.

Salaam ailekum, ailekum
Shanti ... shanti ... shanti ...

Oom ... oom ... oom ... ooom ...

Seek havens of peace on ocean floors,
Submarine depths, in lost worlds, black holes
Collapsed galaxies, in hermit caves
In jungle fastnesses and arctic wastes
Thorns of crowns and hairy shirts, beds of nails,
The saintly cheek that turns the other side, but—
Not in texts, not by learned rote. It's there
The unmeek prove inheritors of the earth.

They are the scripture grooms, possessive
To the last submissive dot. Punctilious
Guards of annotations, they sleepwalk blind to all
But the fatal hiatus:
Boom for oom and—sword for Word.
What is missing is—fulfilled!

X. THE DOG IN DOGMA
Soprano, SATB

... you cyst, you cyst, splint in the arrow of arrogance, the dog in dogma, the tick of a heretic, the tick in politics, the mock of democracy, the mar of marxism the tic of a fanatic, the boo in buddhism, the ham in Mohammed, the dash in the criss-cross of Christ, a dot in the I of ego an ass in the mass, the ash in ashram, a boot in kibbutz, the pee of priesthood, the peepee of perfect priesthood, oh how dare you raise your hind-quarters you dog of dogma and cast the scent of your existence on the lamp-post of destiny you HOLE IN THE ZERO of NOTHING!

Hraagrh hraagrh hraagrh ... ptuh – splat!
Pig!
Hraagrh hraagrh hraagrh ... ptuh – splat!
Pig!
Hraaaaaagrrrrh hraaaaagrrrhaaaarrh...ptuh – splat!
Vile heathen pig!

XI. I AM RIGHT, YOU ARE DEAD.
Baritone, Women

I am right, you are wrong.
I am right, you are dead.

XII. I SHALL PLACE WEREPE ON EVERY TONGUE
Men

But have you heard of werepe
Demosthenes?
Not all your Stoics' calm can douse
The fiery hairs of that infernal pod.
It makes a queen run naked to the world
An itch that tells the world its flesh
Is whorish sick –
I shall place werepe on every tongue.

XIII. I TURNED TO STONE
Mezzo-soprano, SATB

Time vanished. I turned to stone. The world retreated into fumes of swampland.
I am alone with sounds. They acquire a fourth dimension. The body achieves, of course, true weightlessness. I am blown about by the lightest breeze, by the lightest lyrical thought or metaphor. Layer by layer, layer by layer

I need nothing.
I feel nothing.
I desire nothing.

XIV. THE MAN DIES
Instrumental

XV. I'LL DROP SOME RATSBANE ON MY TONGUE

SATB

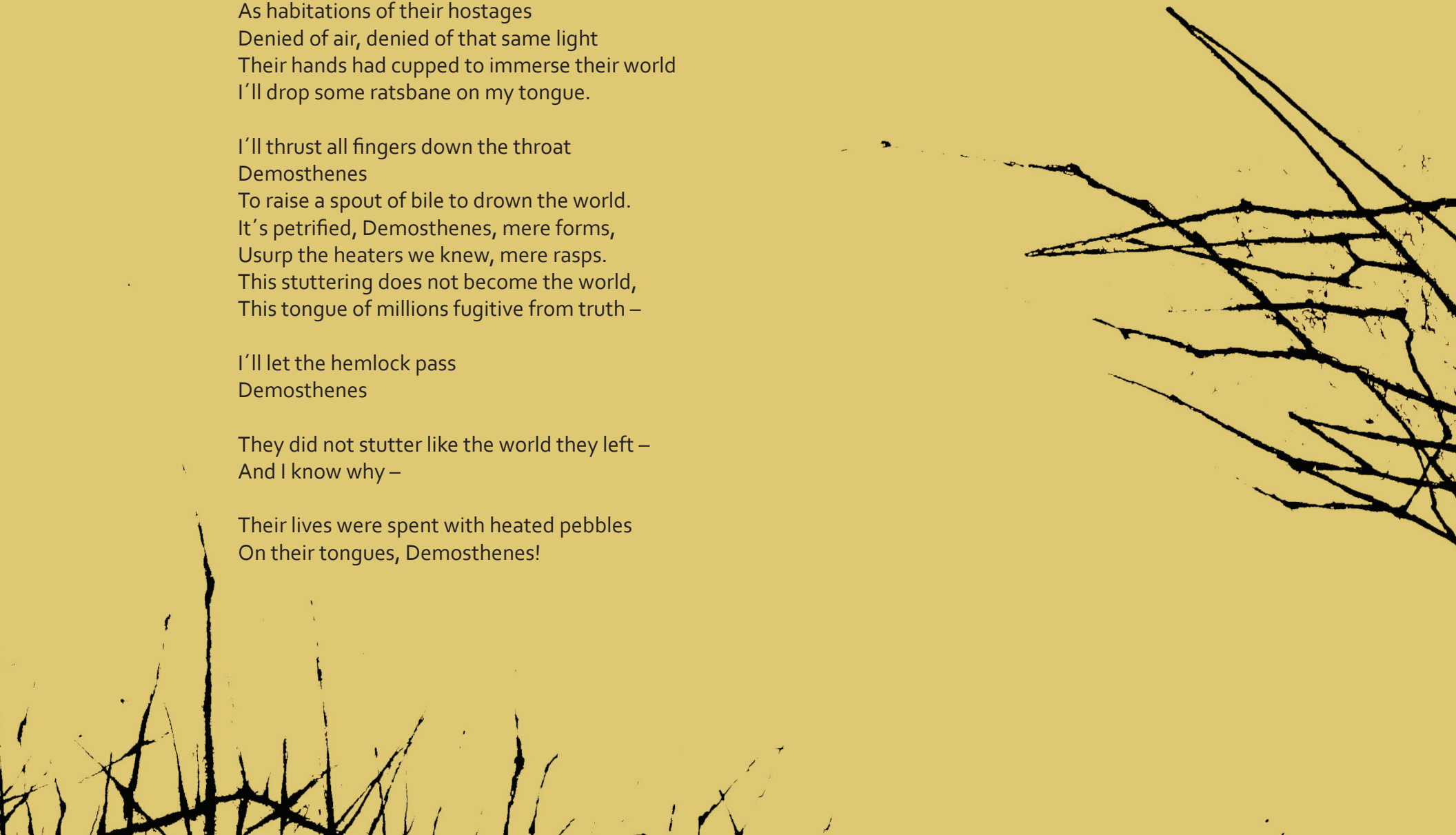
I´ll drop some ratsbane on my tongue
Demosthenes
To bait the rodents with a kiss of death
I´ll seal their fate in tunnels dark and dank
As habitations of their hostages
Denied of air, denied of that same light
Their hands had cupped to immerse their world
I´ll drop some ratsbane on my tongue.

I´ll thrust all fingers down the throat
Demosthenes
To raise a spout of bile to drown the world.
It´s petrified, Demosthenes, mere forms,
Usurp the heaters we knew, mere rasps.
This stuttering does not become the world,
This tongue of millions fugitive from truth –

I´ll let the hemlock pass
Demosthenes

They did not stutter like the world they left –
And I know why –

Their lives were spent with heated pebbles
On their tongues, Demosthenes!



XVI. THE 13TH CANTICLE
SATB

...and a thirteenth for the merely superstitious.
This thirteenth canticle for you, and let
Ill-luck infest your dreams awhile, stress your fears.
Not one but both – Friday and thirteen
Joined to press the entry of my world
Onto your calendar. Would I could boast
A triple six, a Grand Slam by Satan's reckoning –
I would have long submerged the world
In cosmic laughter!

XVII. WHERE ARE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?
Sopranos

From a distant
Shore they cry, Where
Are all the flowers gone?
I cannot tell
The gardens here are furrowed still and bare.
Garlands
Of scavengers weigh
Heavy on human breasts
Such
Are flowers that fill the garden of decay

I saw:
Four steel kites, riders
On shrouded towers
Do you think
Their arms are spread to scatter mountain flowers

Take Justice
In your hands who can
Or dare. Insensate sword
Of Power
Out-herods Herod and the law's outlawed.

XVIII. BI O TI WA
Mezzo-soprano, SATB

Now – As Ever Shall Be …
Bi o ti wa
Ni yio se wa
Bi o ti wa
Ni yio se wa
Bi o ti wa l'atete kose …
Even as it was
So shall it be
Even as it was
So shall it be
Even as it was at the beginning of the act …

XIX. BI O TI WA L'ATETE KOSE…
Instrumental

XX. ON FIRE TODAY
Baritone, SATB

The meek shall inherit the earth …
Blessed are the peacemakers …
Shalom … Shalom … Shalom …
Irosu wonrin, irosu wonrin.
Salaam ailekum, ailekum
Shanti … shanti … shanti …
Oom … oom … oom … ooom …

What is on fire today is not only within the mind, but the very nation space in which we all draw breath. Look left and right, check morning and night and you stumble on new minted issues that drain your vitality and compress the mind's scope of functioning.

We must learn to identify the camouflage of power. Secular or theocratic, that camouflage must be ripped wide open so that the real contender – the latest, smirking, unctuous face of Power in whatever guise, is exposed, and neutralized.

Only then shall we have truly fulfilled our existence and deserved our Freedom, only then would we have concluded our final assignation with – History.

Lansing McLoskey has been described as "a major talent and a deep thinker with a great ear" by the American Composers Orchestra, "an engaging, gifted composer writing smart, compelling and fascinating music" by Gramophone Magazine, and "a distinctive voice in American music." His music has an emotional intensity that appeals to academic and amateur alike, defying traditional stylistic pigeonholes.

McLoskey's music has been performed in twenty countries on six continents, and has won more than two dozen national and international awards, including two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Robert Avalon International Composition Competition, Omaha Symphony International New Music Competition, Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra Composition Competition, Lee Ettelson Composer's Award, and the Charles Ives Center Orchestral Composition Competition. He has been commissioned by the Barlow Endowment, Fromm Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Copland House, Meet The Composer, Pew Charitable Trusts, the New Spectrum Foundation, the International Joint Wind Quintet Project, and numerous ensembles around the world. McLoskey spent twenty years as an early music singer/conductor, and has a special interest in composing for voice. He has written for some of the preeminent vocal ensembles in the world, including The Crossing, The Hilliard Ensemble, Cincinnati Vocal Arts, ensemberlino vocale (Berlin), Boston Choral Ensemble, Liber unUsualis, NOTUS, Tapestry, and Boston Secession. His *Qumran Psalms* – a choral cycle setting lost psalm fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls – won The 2016 American Prize for Choral Composition.

Professor of Composition at Frost School of Music, he regularly serves as Composer-in-Residence at summer music festivals, and has given masterclasses/presentations at more than thirty schools across the United States, Europe, and in Mexico. His music is released on Albany Records, WergoSchallplatten, Innova, Capstone, Tantara, Equilibrium/Soundset, and Beauport Classics. *www.lansingmcloskey.com*

The Crossing is a professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. It is committed to working with creative teams to make and record new, substantial works for choir – most often addressing social issues – with the possibility of changing the way we think about writing for choir, singing in choir, and listening to music for choir.

Highly sought-after for collaborative projects, The Crossing's first such partnership was as the resident choir of the Spoleto Festival in Italy, in 2007. Since then, collaborators include the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), American Composers Orchestra, Network for New Music, Lyric Fest, PRISM Saxophone Quartet, Beth Morrison Projects, Pig Iron Theatre Company, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Mostly Mozart Festival, National Gallery of Art, Kenne-

dy Center for the Performing Arts, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum, Institute for Advanced Study, Carnegie Hall, National Sawdust, and Northwestern University. The Crossing holds an annual residency at the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center in Big Sky, Montana. The Crossing has presented more than 60 commissioned world premieres, including works by Michael Gordon, John Luther Adams, David Lang, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Gavin Bryars, Ted Hearne, Caroline Shaw, David T. Little, Robert Maggio, Gabriel Jackson, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, and Hans Thomalla.

With a commitment to recording its commissions, The Crossing has issued 14 releases, receiving a Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance in 2018, its second nomination in as many years. The Crossing, with Donald Nally, is the American Composers Forum's 2017 Champion of New Music. They are the recipients of the 2015 Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, three ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, and the Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America. *www.crossingchoir.org*

The Crossing is represented by Alliance Artist Management: *allianceartistmanagement.com*

Donald Nally is artistic director at The Crossing. He has served as chorus master at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Welsh National Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and for many seasons at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. He has also served as music director of Cincinnati's Vocal Arts Ensemble, chorus master at The Chicago Bach Project, and guest conductor throughout Europe and the United States, most notably with the Grant Park Symphony Chorus, the Philharmonia Chorus (London), the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, and the Latvian State Choir (Riga). Donald, with The Crossing, won the 2018 Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance with Gavin Bryars' *The Fifth Century.*

Donald, with The Crossing, was named the American Composers Forum 2017 Champion of New Music; he received the 2017 Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art from Chorus America. He is the only conductor to have two ensembles receive the Margaret Hillis Award for Excellence in Choral Music: in 2002 with the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia and in 2015 with The Crossing. Collaborations have included the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Park Avenue Armory, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, Mostly Mozart, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall, National Sawdust, the Barnes Foundation, Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, The National Gallery of Art of Osaka (Japan), Lisson Gallery (London), the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), the American Composers Orchestra, and The Big Sky Conservatory in Montana where The Crossing holds an annual residency.

Donald holds the John W. Beattie Chair in Music at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music where he is professor of conducting and director of choral organizations.

Sources and Permissions

I. RENUNCIATION (PRELUDIUM)
Canticle I. from "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot"

II. LET'S START
Excerpt from an interview with Wole Soyinka by Simon Stanford, 28 April 2005. Used by permission of AB Media.

III. PERCHED ON CHURCH STEEPLE
Canticle II. from "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot."

IV. I INTEND TO BE BLUNT
Opening statement from lecture delivered upon receipt of the Obafemi Awolowo Prize For Leadership, 6 March, 2013. Used by permission.

V. I SHALL RAM PEBBLES IN MY MOUTH
"Ah, Demosthenes!" from "Two Poems for the Pen."

VI. ARMED WITH BOOK AND BEARD
Canticles VI. & XII. from "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot."

VII. THE WRITING ON THE WALL
First part: From a speech delivered at the second South-South Economic Summit in Asaba, Delta State, 26 April, 2012. Printed in The Nation, May 5, 2012.
Second part ("did we fail to learn…": From "Elegy for a Nation (For Chinua Achebe at 70)." Used by permission.

VIII. I SHALL PLACE NETTLES ON MY TONGUE
"Ah, Demosthenes!"

IX. SEEK HAVENS OF PEACE ON OCEAN FLOOR
Canticle IX. from "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot"

X. THE DOG IN DOGMA
From *Madmen and Specialists* and *The Man Died*

XI. I AM RIGHT, YOU ARE DEAD
From Soyinka's article "Power and Freedom/I Am Right; You are Dead," New England Journal of Public Policy, April 2005. Used by permission.

XII. I SHALL PLACE WEREPE ON EVERY TONGUE
"Ah, Demosthenes!"

XIII. I TURNED TO STONE
From *The Man Died*

XV. I'LL DROP SOME RATSBANE ON MY TONGUE
"Ah, Demosthenes!"

XVI. THE 13TH CANTICLE
From "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot"

XVII. WHERE ARE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?
Excerpts from "Flowers For My Land," printed in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972)

XVIII. BI O TI WA
From *Madmen and Specialists*

XX. ON FIRE TODAY
Choral part ("The meek…"): from "Twelve Canticles for a Zealot"
Solo part ("What is on fire today…"): from lecture delivered upon receipt of the Obafemi Awolowo Prize For Leadership, 6 March, 2013. Used by permission.

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