

Hesperus is Phosphorus  
LEWIS SPRATLAN

The Crossing  
Network for New Music  
Donald Nally, conductor

# VESPERS CANTATA: HESPERUS IS PHOSPHORUS (2012)

LEWIS SPRATLAN

## PART I

- |                     |      |
|---------------------|------|
| 1. THE AFTERLIFE I  | 8:19 |
| 2. BIG LIGHT        | 3:31 |
| 3. PARADOX          | 0:59 |
| 4. UNITY            | 9:39 |
| 5. THE AFTERLIFE II | 9:31 |

## PART II

- |                      |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| 6. ESURIENTES        | 3:21  |
| 7. FALLING           | 5:07  |
| 8. STEPPING BACKWARD | 12:45 |
| 9. THE AFTERLIFE III | 14:30 |

—67:45—

A collaboration featuring  
The Crossing  
Network for New Music  
(Linda Reichert, Artistic Director)  
Donald Nally, conductor



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VESPERS CANTATA:  
HESPERUS IS PHOSPHORUS



## **Network for New Music Ensemble**

Linda Reichert, Artistic Director

Jan Krzywicki, Conductor

Arne Running, clarinet

Angela Cordell Bilger, French horn

Guillaume Combet, violin

Priscilla Lee, cello

Susan Nowicki, piano

Phillip O'Banion, percussion

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Daniel Spratlan<sup>7</sup>

Karen Wapner

John Grecia and Laura Ward,  
rehearsal accompanists

Donald Nally, conductor

## *Solos*

1 – Big Light

2 – Paradox

3 – Unity

4 – The Afterlife II

5 – Falling

6 – Stepping Backward

7 – The Afterlife III

Cantata: Hesperus is Phosphorus *was jointly commissioned by Network for New Music and The Crossing.*

Phosphorus is the morning star, Hesperus the evening star. Or, so the Greeks thought for many centuries until their astronomers concluded that the Babylonians were correct; the morning star is the evening star — a single celestial body, our Venus, seen at dusk and at dawn. Hesperus is Phosphorus.

We come to such conclusions periodically; perception — based on our experiences and limited by the confines of our vantage point — often requires modification as our view widens. For the Greeks, at that moment, this required a doctrinal change, a revised theological landscape, for in the heavens they saw their gods; those whose positions move (our planets) were of a greater deity than the lesser, stationary gods (the stars). Hesperus is Phosphorus; their unity created a new, greater, god.

We live in a world in which perception changes quickly as our knowledge base grows exponentially; it is easy to be confused or lost, drowning in an ever-growing sea of seeming paradoxes; the American physicist Richard Feynman reminds us, “a paradox is not a conflict within reality. It is a conflict between

reality and your feeling of what reality ought to be.” Here his words stand as a kind of ‘reality check’ in the midst of a libretto we’ve constructed from contemporary authors which takes us through an undulating journey of humanness — of our perceptions and hopes and disappointments, of unimagined possibilities and limitless imagination, of stark truths and of those ideas that lie beyond our grasp.

The Romans translated Hesperus as Vespers, which has passed down to us in images of peaceful twilight and of evening prayer and serves as the inspiration for a yearlong Vespers series by The Crossing that is the thematic frame for this cantata. Conceived as a secular work, it nonetheless partakes lightly of *Magnificat* texts towards the end, as these words of Mary that most characterize Vespers enfold humility and modesty.

The piece falls into two parts. Three “tales of the afterlives” from David Eagleman’s *Sum* articulate this structure by opening it, closing Part I, and closing the entire work. These movements serve as pillars upon which the piece is built, but beyond structure they represent progression: *The Afterlife I* offers hope of true equality in Heaven; in *The Afterlife II* God is missing and arguments about his whereabouts explode into war and carnage (“We

have ascended and brought the front lines with us”); *The Afterlife III* entertains a world in which our atoms drift off and combine with those of myriad other beings, animate and inanimate, while retaining markers of ourselves — we expand from the corporeal to the universal.

In *Big Light*, following *The Afterlife I*, Wallace Stevens contemplates floods of moonlight under the “westward evening star.” Paradox, in physicist Richard Feynman’s reconsideration, is coupled to Unity, A. R. Ammons’s sermon on the unattainability of unity and The Absolute. These lead to *The Afterlife II* and the conclusion of Part I.

The *Magnificat* emerges for the first time in *Esu-rientes*, the opening number of Part II. This unique a cappella movement evokes through its structure the filling of the hungry with good things and the rich “sent empty away.” *Falling*, the conclusion of Wallace Shawn’s dramatic monologue *The Fever*, envisions with horror a return to familiar surroundings forever changed. *Stepping Backward*, Adrienne Rich’s autumnal reflections on an old love affair — noting losses but buoyed by truths uncovered — leads to *The Afterlife III* and a celebration of our limitless existence as members of the universal community of atoms.

— Lewis Spratlan & Donald Nally

# Part I

## **The Afterlife I**

### **“Egalitaire” from *Sum* by David Eagleman**

In the afterlife you discover that God understands the complexities of life. She had originally submitted to peer pressure when She structured Her universe like all the other gods had, with a binary categorization of people into good and evil. But it didn't take long for Her to realize that humans could be good in many ways and simultaneously corrupt and mean-spirited in other ways. How was She to arbitrate who goes to Heaven or to Hell? Might not it be possible, She considered, that a man could be an embezzler and still give to charitable causes? Might not a woman be an adulteress but bring pleasure and security to two men's lives? Might not a child unwittingly divulge secrets that splinter a family? Dividing the population into two categories – good and bad — seemed like a more reasonable task when She was younger, but with experience these decisions became more difficult.

Then a better idea struck Her generous spirit. She could afford it: She would grant everyone, every last human, a place in Heaven. After all, everyone has something good inside; it was part of the design specifications. Her new plan brought back the bounce to Her

gait, returned the color to Her cheeks. She shut down the operations in Hell, fired the Devil, and brought every last human to be by Her side in Heaven.

The most important aspect of Her new system is that everyone is treated equally. There is no longer fire for some and harp music for others. The afterlife is no longer defined by cots versus waterbeds, raw potatoes versus sushi, hot water versus champagne. Everyone is a brother to all, and for the first time an idea has been realized that never came to fruition on Earth: true equality.

The Communists are baffled and irritated, because they have finally achieved their perfect society, but only with the help of a God in whom they don't want to believe. The meritocrats are abashed that they're stuck for eternity in an incentiveless system with a bunch of pinkos. The conservatives have no penniless to disparage; the liberals have no downtrodden to promote.

So God sits on the edge of Her bed and weeps at night, because the only thing everyone can agree upon is that they're all in Hell.



## **Big Light**

### **“Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination” by Wallace Stevens**

Last Friday, in the big light of last Friday night,  
We drove home from Cornwall to Hartford, late.

It was not a night blown at a glassworks in Vienna  
Or Venice, motionless, gathering time and dust.

There was a crush of strength in a grinding going round,  
Under the front of the westward evening star,

The vigor of glory, a glittering in the veins,  
As things emerged and moved and were dissolved,

Either in distance, change or nothingness,  
The visible transformations of summer night,

An argentine abstraction approaching form  
And suddenly denying itself away.

There was an insolid billowing of the solid.  
Night's moonlight lake was neither water nor air.



## **Paradox**

### **Quotation from Richard Feynman**

“A paradox is not a conflict within reality.  
It is a conflict between reality and your feeling of what reality ought to be.”



## Unity

### “Guide” by A.R. Ammons

You cannot come to unity and remain material:  
in that perception is no perceiver:

when you arrive  
you have gone too far:

at the Source you are in the mouth of Death:

you cannot

turn around in  
the Absolute: there are no entrances or exits

no precipitations of forms  
to use like tongs against the formless:  
no freedom to choose:

to be

you have to stop not-being and break  
off from *is* to *flowing* and  
this is the sin you weep and praise:  
origin is your original sin:  
the return you long for will ease your guilt  
and you will have your longing:

the wind that is my guide said this: it  
should know having  
given up everything to eternal being but  
direction:

how I said can I be glad and sad: but a man goes  
from one foot to the other:

wisdom wisdom:

to be glad and sad at once is also unity  
and death:

wisdom wisdom: a peach blossom blooms on a particular  
tree on a particular day:

unity cannot do anything in particular:

are these the thoughts you want me to think I said but  
the wind was gone and there was no more knowledge then.



## **The Afterlife II** **“Absence” from *Sum* by David Eagleman**

Heaven looked approximately like people said it would: vast gardens of flora and fauna, angels with harps, San Diego weather. But when you first arrived, you were surprised to find that everything was in disrepair. The gardens were vastly overgrown. The angels were gaunt, sitting on blankets with small paper cups for change in front of their dented harps. They tinkled out a small ditty as you walked by. The day was warm but the sky was gray with smog.

God is gone. The rumor is that He stepped out long ago, saying He'd be right back.

Some people hypothesize that God is never planning to return. Others say God went crazy; others assert He loves us but was called away to spawn new universes. Some say He is angry, others say He contracted Alzheimer's. Some hypothesize He is on siesta, others on fiesta. Some say God does not care; some say God cared but has passed away. Others suggest that it doesn't make sense to ask where He went, since He may never have been present. Perhaps aliens, not a god at all, built this place. Some ask

whether we owe our afterlives to scientific principles not yet understood. Others predict God is about to return at any moment: they point out that His days correspond to our millennia, and perhaps He's on an afternoon's drive.

Whatever lies behind His absence, it hasn't taken long for the garden to degrade into a Hobbesian jungle. People have belligerently taken sides based on their disappearance theories, and the debates rise like plumes of black smoke. At one point, someone found an old footprint of God's in a far reach of the garden and tried to carbon-date it, but no one agrees on the results.

Then an incredible thing happened. Someone started brawling, someone started shooting, someone started bombing, and now war has broken out on the consecrated plains of Heaven. New arrivals are swept directly into boot camp and trained in weaponry. The afterlife, as anyone here will tell you, is not what it used to be. We have ascended and brought the front lines with us.

The new religious wars do not pivot on God's definition but instead on His whereabouts. The new Crusaders mount attacks against infidels who believe God is returning; the new Jihadis bomb those who don't believe

that God has other universes to attend; the new Thirty Years War rages between those who think that God is physically ailing and those who find the suggestion of fallibility sacrilegious. The new Hundred Years War wages between those who have concluded He never existed in the first place and those who have concluded He's on a romantic junket with his girlfriend.

That's the history. That's why you're under this defoliating tree now, machine-gun chatter in your ears, your nose aching with Agent Orange, bazooka rounds lighting up the night, clenching the blood-blackened soil in your fingers while the leaves drop around you, loyally crusading for your version of God's non-existence.

# Part II

## **Esurientes from the *Magnificat***

*Esurientes implevit bonis  
et divites dimisit inanes.*

(He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.)

- Luke 1:53

**Falling**  
**from *The Fever* by Wallace Shawn**

I blow out the candle and swim across the room toward my beautiful bed. Inside my covers, head on the pillow, I swim toward sleep. Next week, home.

What will be home? My own bed. My night table. And on the table—what? On the table—what?—blood—death—a fragment of bone—a fragment—a piece—of a human brain—a severed hand.— Let everything filthy, everything vile, sit by my bed, where once I had my lamp and clock, books, letters, presents for my birthday, and left over from the presents bright-colored ribbons. Forgive me. Forgive me. I know you forgive me. I'm still falling.

## Stepping Backward

### “Stepping Backward” by Adrienne Rich

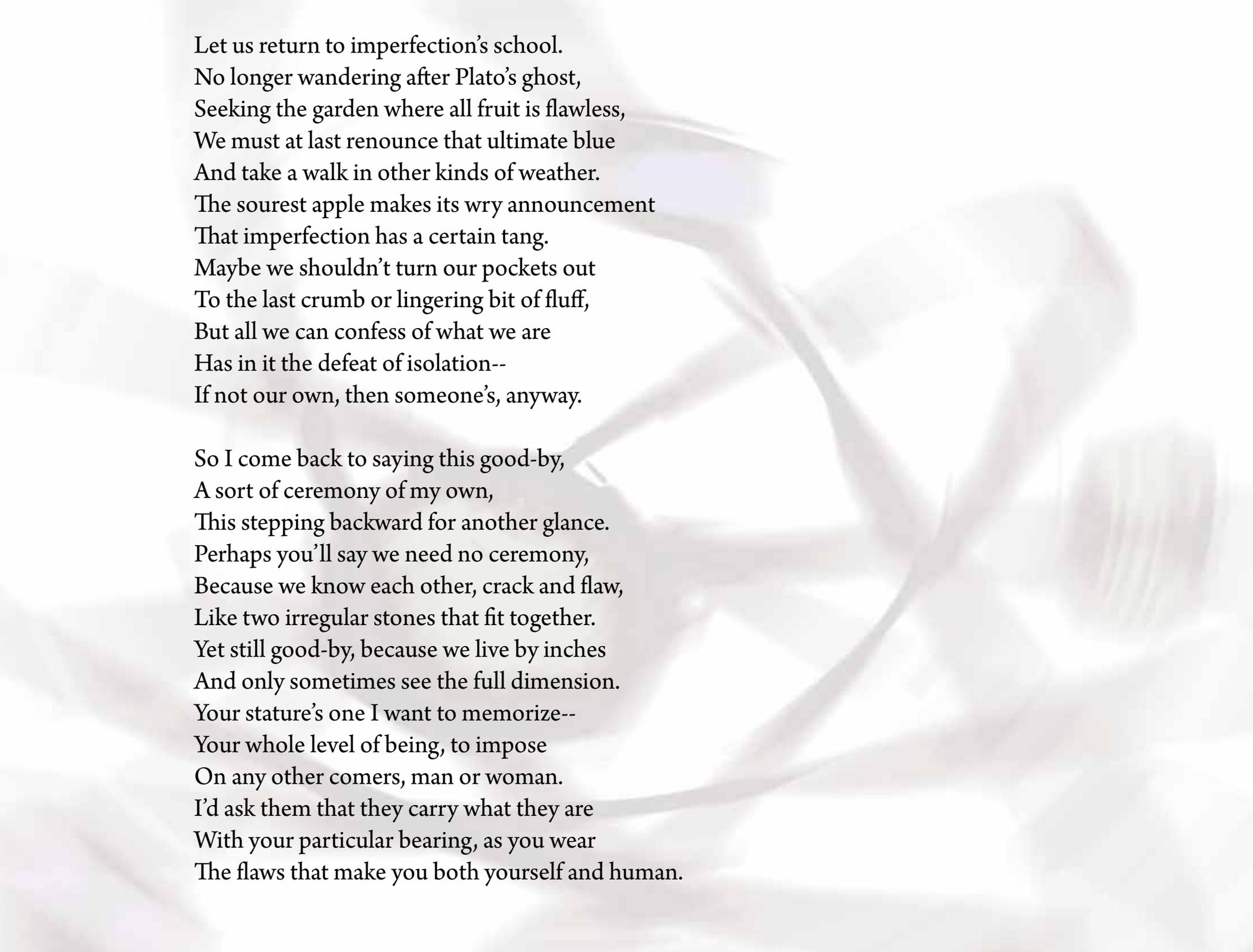
Good-by to you whom I shall see tomorrow,  
Next year and when I'm fifty; still good-by.  
This is the leave we never really take.  
If you were dead or gone to live in China  
The event might draw your stature into mind.  
I should be forced to look upon you whole  
The way we look upon the things we lose.  
We see each other daily and in segments;  
Parting might make us meet anew, entire.

You asked me once, and I could give no answer,  
How far dare we throw off the daily ruse,  
Official treacheries of face and name,  
Have out our true identity? I could hazard  
An answer now, if you are asking still.  
We are a small and lonely human race  
Showing no sign of mastering solitude  
Out on this stony planet that we farm.  
The most that we can do for one another  
Is let our blunders and our blind mischances  
Argue a certain brusque abrupt compassion.  
We might as well be truthful. I should say  
They're luckiest who know they're not unique;  
But only art or common interchange  
Can teach that kindest truth. And even art  
Can only hint at what disturbed a Melville

Or calmed a Mahler's frenzy; you and I  
Still look from separate windows every morning  
Upon the same white daylight in the square.

And when we come into each other's rooms  
Once in awhile, encumbered and self-con-  
scious,  
We hover awkwardly about the threshold  
And usually regret the visit later.  
Perhaps the harshest fact is, only lovers  
Unlearn that clumsiness of rare intrusion  
And let each other freely come and go.  
Most of us shut too quickly into cupboards  
The margin-scribbled books, the dried gera-  
nium,  
The penny horoscope, letters never mailed.  
The door may open, but the room is altered;  
Not the same room we look from night and day.

It takes a late and slowly blooming wisdom  
To learn that those we marked infallible  
Are only tragicomic stumblers like ourselves.  
The knowledge breeds reserve. We walk on  
tiptoe,  
Demanding more than we know how to render.  
Two-edged discovery hunts us finally down;  
The human act will make us real again,  
And then perhaps we come to know each other.



Let us return to imperfection's school.  
No longer wandering after Plato's ghost,  
Seeking the garden where all fruit is flawless,  
We must at last renounce that ultimate blue  
And take a walk in other kinds of weather.  
The sourest apple makes its wry announcement  
That imperfection has a certain tang.  
Maybe we shouldn't turn our pockets out  
To the last crumb or lingering bit of fluff,  
But all we can confess of what we are  
Has in it the defeat of isolation--  
If not our own, then someone's, anyway.

So I come back to saying this good-by,  
A sort of ceremony of my own,  
This stepping backward for another glance.  
Perhaps you'll say we need no ceremony,  
Because we know each other, crack and flaw,  
Like two irregular stones that fit together.  
Yet still good-by, because we live by inches  
And only sometimes see the full dimension.  
Your stature's one I want to memorize--  
Your whole level of being, to impose  
On any other comers, man or woman.  
I'd ask them that they carry what they are  
With your particular bearing, as you wear  
The flaws that make you both yourself and human.



### The Afterlife III

#### “Search” from *Sum* by David Eagleman

In the moment of transition between life and death, only one thing changes: you lose the momentum of the biochemical cycles that keep the machinery running. In the moment before death you are still composed of the same thousand trillion trillion atoms as in the moment after death – the only difference is that their neighborly network of social interactions has ground to a halt.

At that moment, the atoms begin to drift apart, no longer enslaved to the goals of keeping up a human form. The interacting pieces that once constructed your body begin to unravel like a sweater, each thread spiraling off in a different direction. Following your last breath, those thousand trillion trillion atoms begin to blend into the earth around you. As you degrade, your atoms become incorporated into new constellations: the leaf of a stag-horn fern, a speckled snail shell, a kernel of maize, a beetle’s mandible, a waxen bloodroot, a ptarmigan’s tail feather.

But it turns out your thousand trillion trillion atoms were not an accidental collection: each was labeled as composing you and continues to be so wherever it goes. So you’re

not gone, you’re simply taking on different forms. Instead of your gestures being the raising of an eyebrow or a blown kiss, now a gesture might consist of a rising gnat, a waving wheat stalk, and the inhaling lung of a breaching beluga whale. Your manner of expressing joy might become a seaweed sheet playing on a lapping wave, a pendulous funnel dancing from a cumulonimbus, a flapping grunion birthing, a glossy river pebble gliding around an eddy.

*Et exsultavit spiritus meus*  
(And my spirit hath rejoiced)  
- Luke 1:47

From your present clumped point of view, this afterlife may sound unnervingly distributed. But in fact it is wonderful. You can’t imagine the pleasure of stretching your redefined body across vast territories: ruffling your grasses and bending your pine branch and flexing an egret’s wings while pushing a crab toward the surface through coruscating shafts of light. Lovemaking reaches heights it could never dream of in the compactness of human corporality. Now you can communicate in many places along your bodies at once; you weave your versatile hands over

your lover's multiflorous figure. Your rivers run together. You move in concert as interdigitating creatures of the meadow, entangled vegetation bursting from the fields, caressing weather fronts that climax into thunderstorms.

Once every few millennia, all your atoms pull together again, traveling from around the globe, like the leaders of nations uniting for a summit, converging for their densest reunion in the form of a human. They are driven by nostalgia to regroup into the tight pinpoint geometry in which they began. In this form they can relish a forgotten sense of holiday-like intimacy. They come together to search for something they once knew but didn't appreciate at the time.

The reunion is warm and heartening for a while, but it isn't long before they begin to miss their freedom. In the form of a human the atoms suffer a claustrophobia of size: gestures are agonizingly limited, restricted to the foundering of tiny limbs. As a condensed human they cannot see around corners, they can only talk within short distances to the nearest ear, they cannot reach out to touch across any meaningful expanses. We are the moment of least facility for the atoms. And in this form, they find themselves longing to ascend mountains, wander the seas, and conquer the air, seeking to recapture the limitlessness they once knew.

*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

(As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.)

- Doxology

## CITATIONS

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## ABOUT THE COMPOSER



Photo: Gigi Kaeser

**Lewis Spratlan**, recipient of the 2000 Pulitzer Prize in music, was born in 1940 in Miami, Florida. His music, often praised for its dramatic impact and vivid scoring, is performed regularly throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. He holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Yale University, where he studied with Mel Powell and Gunther Schuller. From 1970 until his retirement in 2006 he served on the music faculty of Amherst College, and has also taught and conducted at Penn State University, Tanglewood, and the Yale Summer School of Music.

He is the recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Composition, as well as Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Bogliasco, NEA, Massachusetts Cultural Council, and MacDowell Fellowships. In October 1989 Spratlan toured widely in Russia and Armenia as a guest of the Soviet Composers' Union. *Toccapsody*, for solo piano, and *Apollo and Daphne Variations* for orchestra were premiered on this tour and *Penelope's Knees*,

double concerto for alto saxophone and bass, was presented in Moscow's Rachmaninoff Hall under Emin Khatchaturian.

Recent works include the one-act opera *Earthrise*, on a libretto by Constance Congdon, commissioned by San Francisco Opera; a piano quartet, *Streaming*, commissioned by the Ravinia Festival for its centennial celebration; *Sojourner* for ten players, commissioned for Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress; *Zoom*, for chamber orchestra, commissioned by the New York ensemble Sequitur; *Wonderer*, commissioned for the pianist Jonathan Biss by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust; *Shadow*, commissioned by the cellist Matt Haimovitz; and *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra*, a consortium commission by thirty saxophonists across the country. *A Summer's Day*, commissioned by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Gil Rose, conductor, was premiered at Jordan Hall in May of 2009.

Spratlan's opera *Life is a Dream* received its world premiere by the Santa Fe Opera in 2010, under the baton of Leonard Slatkin. *Architect*, a chamber opera based on the life and work of the architect Louis Kahn, appears on a CD/enhanced DVD released by Navona Records in the fall of 2013. He has recently completed *Shining: Double Concerto for Cello and Piano*, commissioned by

cellist Matt Haimovitz and pianist Christopher O'Riley. In the fall of 2014 The Boston Modern Orchestra Project released a CD of *A Summer's Day, Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra*, and *Apollo and Daphne Variations*. In April 2015 *Of War*, for large chorus and orchestra will be premiered under the direction of Andrew Megill at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is currently at work on a new opera, a black French-Caribbean *Medea*, c. 1930, on a libretto by Michael Miller.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

**The Crossing** is a twenty-four-member professional chamber choir conducted by **Donald Nally** and dedicated to new music. Consistently recognized in critical reviews, The Crossing has been hailed as “ardently angelic” (*Los Angeles Times*, 4/14) and “something of a miracle” (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7/14). Originally formed by a group of friends in 2005, the ensemble has since grown exponentially and “has made a name for itself in recent years as a champion of new music.” (*The New York Times*, 2/14). Highly sought-after for collaborative projects, The Crossing was the resident choir of the Spoleto Festival, Italy in 2007; appeared at Miller Theatre of Columbia University in the American premiere of James Dillon's *Nine Rivers* with the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE); joined Bang on a

Can's first Philadelphia Marathon; and has appeared with the American Composers Orchestra, Network for New Music, Lyric Fest, Piffaro, red fish blue fish, Tempesta di Mare Baroque Chamber Orchestra, PRISM Saxophone Quartet, Toshimaru Nakamura, Dolce Suono, and in the summer of 2013, The Rolling Stones. The ensemble has sung in such venues as Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Crossing frequently commissions works and has presented over forty world premieres. The ensemble is the recipient of two ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming as well as the Dale Warland Singers Commissioning Award from Chorus America. Its concerts are broadcast on Philadelphia Public Radio WRTI 90.1 FM.

Founded over 30 years ago, **Network for New Music** has become one of the country's pre-eminent commissioning and performing ensembles of contemporary classical music. Artistic Director **Linda Reichert** draws in the very best composers from across the nation and the world, and programs their work with that of the best and most interesting Philadelphia composers. As performed by the brilliant Network for New Music Ensemble (many of whom are also members of The Philadelphia Orchestra), the result is an invigorating and exceptional take on the best of contemporary music, and a window into the

future's standard repertoire. Network's creative programming and spectacular musicianship has attracted world-class guest artists and composers such as Leon Fleisher, Peter Serkin, William Bolcom, Christoph Eschenbach, and many others; and Network often collaborates with artists from the worlds of dance, video, poetry and theater. Through residencies, workshops, and outreach concerts, the ensemble nurtures the gifts and enthusiasm of students who write and play the music of the next generation.

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