

Program Notes

OH TOO (2002, 2007)

Oh Too is one of a handful of “early” works that I still claim, though only after it found significant revision in 2007. It is scored for a small, but unique percussion ensemble.

What does the title mean? While it could stand for “oxygen” (O₂), *Oh Too* is simply a play-on-words for the calendar year in which it was conceived.

NOMMO (2007)

In the fall of 2007, Meggi Sweeney (dancer, choreographer, and friend) asked me to write a piece for her. For inspiration, she gave to me a quote from *The Poisonwood Bible*: “Nommo comes from the mouth like water vapor: a song, a poem, a scream, a prayer, a name, all these are nommo.”

I was quite taken by the song, scream, and prayer elements, and decided to use these to fashion movements for the work. Meggi choreographed the results, and it has turned into one of my most oft-performed pieces at KU. Since Meggi has moved to New York, tonight's performance is without choreography.

KAYKHOSROW'S ASCENSION (2006)

Inspired by Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Persian Book of Kings), *Kaykhosrow's Ascension* is a loosely-programmatic work depicting the suffering and eventual heavenly departure of Kaykhosrow, one of ancient Persia's greatest kings.

After many years of honorable ruling, Kaykhosrow became sated with kingship. As the descendant of the righteous Kavus and the wicked Afrasyab, he began to feel the weight of his crooked heritage. For five weeks he locked himself away and prayed, anguishing lest he fall into wicked ways. One night the angel Soroush appeared to him in a dream and comforted him, saying “You will find a home beside the Source of Righteousness, there is no need for you to sojourn in this darkness any longer.” Kaykhosrow then gave away all of his riches and even his crown. With a party of his followers he made his way up a mountainside. During the night he disappeared, leaving no earthly trace.

Musically, the “ascension” of Kaykhosrow is found in the octatonic scale. Each section of the piece ascends by one note in the scale, though there is one slight alteration. There is one central theme – all thematic material grows out of the main idea. In the final section there is an eventual breakdown as the parts become disassociated with one another and eventually disappear, thus representing Kaykhosrow's final moments and mystical renunciation of the world.

Kaykhosrow's Ascension was commissioned by Mike Kirkendoll and Mary Fukushima and premiered in Carnegie Hall.

TU QUI CONSORTEM (2007)

Commissioned by Tod Fish, this work brings to life one of the “war poems” by Sextus Propertius (c. 50 – 15 BCE). The story is told from the point of view of a mortally-wounded soldier (Gallus) addressing another wounded soldier who is stumbling down the ramparts. Seeing his wounded comrade recoil in horror at the sight of his wounds, Gallus addresses him as a friend (“I am part of your closest armed comrades.”).

The poem (and the music) abruptly shift to a sense of urgency as Gallus tells his friend to leave. “Don't stop! Get out and save yourself!” By leaving Gallus behind, the soldier can make it home to his family. This fate does not await dying soldiers like Gallus, who tells how he almost made it through enemy lines, but was struck by “an unknown hand.”

The final section contains Gallus' simple, yet powerful, request – to be remembered. The idea of bleached bones lying uncovered is not only disturbing, but it is a permanent disfigurement of the funeral ritual – one that was not lost on the Romans. “...let him know that these bones are MINE.”

Tu, qui consortem properas evadere casum,
miles ab Etruscis saucius aggeribus,
quid nostro gemitu turgentia lumina torques?
pars ego sum vestrae proxima militiae.
sic te servato ut possint gaudere parentes,
haec soror acta tuis sentiat e lacrimis:
Gallum per medios ereptum Caesaris enses
effugere ignotas non potuisse manus;
et quaecumque super dispersa invenerit ossa
montibus Etruscis, haec sciat esse mea.

You, who hurries to avoid our common fate,
wounded soldier from the Etruscan ramparts,
what makes you turn your wide eyes toward my moaning?
I am one of your closest armed comrades.
Thus, save yourself, so that your parents may rejoice,
but let my sister know of my fate through your tears:
that Gallus stole away through the midst of Caesar's swords
but was unable to escape an unknown hand;
and whoever will come upon my scattered bones
on the Etruscan hillside, let him know that these bones are mine.

~ translation by Brian Bondari ~

LAMB OF GOD (2002, 2007)

Like *Oh Too*, *Lamb of God* is a heavily-revised, but surviving “early” piece. It was originally composed as a Men's trio, but later expanded for Men's Chorus.

DIV (2007)

Inspired by stories from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Persian Book of Kings), *Div* is a work depicting the dual facets of these colorful beings.

A “div” (pronunciation: deev) often has negative associations, and in Persian mythology is an evil spirit akin to a demon that loves to cause harm and destruction. However, some *divs* may actually be helpful and benign. Unlike in Judeo-Christian tradition, a *div* is a physical being, often pictured with combined human and animal features. Though they have two arms and legs like humans, often they feature tufted tails like a lion, hairy, multicolored bodies, and bestial faces. *Divs* are frequently mentioned in the *Shahnameh*; one famous story involves the struggle between the Persian hero Rostam and the *Akvan Div*, a white demon whose name means “evil mind.”

Musically, the first half of the piece represents the malevolent side of *divs*, whereas the latter half represents their benign nature. Subtitled *Ahura*, a Farsi word representing the “right” kind of divinity and the moral opposite of evil, this latter half utilizes much of the same melodic content, though slightly transformed. Does the work end in a pure, righteous state, or do some elements of the “evil” *div* mischievously return? The listener may fully decide.

Div was commissioned by the KU Helianthus Contemporary ensemble.

FERIDOUN (2005)

As you can see, much of my work is inspired by Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Persian Book of Kings). *Feridoun* is a loosely-programmatic work depicting the struggle and coming to power of one of ancient Persia's earliest kings.

In Persian mythology, the lands were ruled by an evil tyrant named Zakhak. Two snakes grew from his shoulders, and Zakhak ordered that two people must die each day in order to satiate the snakes. Fear spread amongst the people, and they longed for justice and revenge. One night, Zakhak dreamed that a boy named Feridoun would eventually dethrone him. Terrified, he ordered that this boy be found and killed.

For years, Feridoun's mother kept him one step ahead of Zakhak. When he was a teenager, he learned that Zakhak had sacrificed and fed his father to the ever-hungry snakes. Enraged, he joined a small uprising against Zakhak and led his envoy into battle. Singlehandedly he defeated Zakhak and bound him in a cave beneath Mount Damavand. The tyrant cast down, Feridoun ruled the earth with benevolence and justice for the rest of his long lifetime.

Musically, *Feridoun* is a through-composed piece, each section directly relating to an aspect from the story. Many of the sections have subtitles, a few of which are “Zakhak,” “Kaveh's Revolt,” “The Battle of Zakhak and Feridoun,” and “The Divine *Farr*.”

Feridoun was commissioned by Daniel Swilley.