THE SONG OF LIFE

For Soprano, Baritone, Chamber Choir and Chamber Orchestra

by

Ming-Hsiu Yen

A composition submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
(Music: Composition)
in The University of Michigan
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Doctoral Committee:
Professor Bright Sheng, Chair
Professor Shuen-fu Lin
Professor John. L. Skelton
Associate Professor Wayne C. Petty
Associate Professor Erik R. Santos
To my mom, dad and sister
THE SONG OF LIFE (生命之歌) is written for soprano, baritone, chamber choir, and chamber orchestra, with texts taken from Mandarin Chinese poetry by living Taiwanese poet YANG Ping (楊平, b. 1957). Mr. Yang’s poetry belongs to the neo-classical genre in modern Chinese poetry. The subjects of his poetry vary greatly, ranging from religions, philosophy, and meditation, to social movements. I use the texts of four poems from three books by Mr. Yang. Originally these poems were not related to each other, but in my composition, each poem serves as a single movement of my four-movement composition.

The first movement, Spring Grass (春草), states that “last year’s death has been buried, the memories have vanished in an unknown swampland, and the short and sad romance has melted as snow.” However, the deceased life has become nutrition to the land, and through death brings the birth of spring grass. As Mr. Yang states, “Death is another form of rebirth,” which accords with the Buddhist belief in reincarnation; when our bodies return to the land, the grass will eventually grow after the snow melts.

The second movement, Stupa at the End of the World (末世浮屠), describes the world today as if it is the Last Day, in which humanity’s greed for power and money brings hate, war, and death. Although people might be alive physically, they are, in another sense, spiritually dead. To contrast with the scene of the Last Day, the middle section, marked Lamento, expresses the hopelessness of humankind, who desperately call for the Lord. In addition to symbols of Christianity, the word “stupa” in the title refers to a mound of mud or clay that covers relics of the Buddha or the funeral monuments of Buddhist monks.

The third movement, Nothing Cannot, But an Aircraft (沒有什麼不是飛行器), in contrast to the destructive second movement, intends to remind people of hope as long as we look inside our hearts with peace and serenity. As the poet states, the blossom in our heart will connect with the whole universe, and everything in the world, even a tiny grain of sand, will become a complete “One.”

The fourth movement, I Want to Sing a Song of Humankind (我要唱一首人類之歌), is meant to positively transform the images of the “buried death,” the “melted romance,” and the “vanished memories” in the first movement. After the statement, “To wake the great land from its slumber, I want to recall people’s memories…with dark pupils flashing, seek to piece together the jigsaw puzzles of shattered dreams.” Mr. Yang again uses the “grass” as a symbol of rebirth. “When the soul regains its peace, I shall breathe as the green grass does.”
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INSTRUMENTATION

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in B♭
Bassoon

Horn in F I
Horn in F II
Trumpet in C
Trombone
Tuba

Percussion
(Timpani x 5, Snare Drum, Marimba)

Soprano solo
Baritone solo

Chorus (SATB)

Strings

Duration: Approximately 35 minutes
The score is transposed.

Premiere:
April 17, 2010, School of Music, Theatre & Dance of the University of Michigan
(Oriol Sans, Conductor; Reed Criddle, Director of Chorus; Meng-Chun Lin, Soprano;
Brian Carter, Baritone)
LYRICS

* Lyrics: poetry of Yang Ping (楊平).
* English translation: Richard Liu (劉釋眠).

I. 春草 / Spring Grass

去年的死亡已被埋葬。
去年的記憶也隨風遠去。
消逝在不知名的河的盡頭。
— 女孩的名字如此。
那段遙遠往事的憧憬
也在瞬息  恍惚地逝去。

去年的死亡已被埋葬。
去年的記憶也隨風遠去。
消逝在不知名的河的盡頭。
— 女孩的名字如此。
那段遙遠往事的憧憬
也在瞬息  恍惚地逝去。

Last year’s death has been buried.  
And the memories of the previous year have grown like the reeds taller than the chest.  
And vanished in an unknown swampland.  
— so has that girl’s name.  
that short and sad romance has
after the snow thawed  also melted.


去年的死亡已被埋葬。
去年的記憶也隨風遠去。
消逝在不知名的河的盡頭。
— 女孩的名字如此。
那段遙遠往事的憧憬
也在瞬息  恍惚地逝去。

Last year’s death has been buried.  
And the memories of the previous year have grown like the reeds taller than the chest.  
And vanished in an unknown swampland.  
— so has that girl’s name.  
that short and sad romance has
after the snow thawed  also melted.


因為死亡本是另一種形式的復活——
搖曳的春草啊，種下的不是記憶
散發的也不只是清香

For death is essentially another kind of rebirth:  
Oh, the waving spring grass!  What is buried is not just memories  
What is given out is more than fragrance.


搖曳的春草啊，種下的不是記憶
散發的也不只是清香

Oh, the waving spring grass!  What is buried is not just memories  
What is given out is more than fragrance.


我看见天堂露水密密的洒落——
大雪覆盖 香蕉的或漆黑大地
辣木料子和金黄色的甘蔗
與幸福 STEVENS 一日一日的
把我们推入预言中的恐怖情结

I saw clouds as tightly woven as cobwebs, sprawling in the distant sky—  
Big crooks caved  Lightning bolts struck at every part of the land  
Uncontrollable arms of men were still hustling blindly  
Rushing, day after day, toward the cliff edge of the century,  
Pushing themselves toward the predicted doomsday of horrors.


我看见天堂露水密密的洒落——
大雪覆盖 香蕉的或漆黑大地
辣木料子和金黄色的甘蔗
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Uncontrollable arms of men were still hustling blindly  
Rushing, day after day, toward the cliff edge of the century,  
Pushing themselves toward the predicted doomsday of horrors.


I heard desperate sighs from shepherds in the distance
“My Lord, where are you . . .”

I saw clouds as tightly woven as cobwebs, sprawling in the distant sky—  
Big crooks caved  Lightning bolts struck at every part of the land  
Uncontrollable arms of men were still hustling blindly  
Rushing, day after day, toward the cliff edge of the century,  
Pushing themselves toward the predicted doomsday of horrors.


The sounds of burning bones knocking on the gates of hell, which are about to open,  
Joined with the tempest, rain and thunder,  
Song of Death.

III. 沒有什麼不是飛行器 / Nothing Cannot, But an Aircraft

沒有任何力量阻止地球運轉

沒有任何力量可以把大海

天上下雨

沒有什麼不是飛行器

夢消失。還很難

想實現了，還很困難

在平靜的湖面倒映

整個宇宙的芳芳

自裡、夜裡，一個聲音在內心使我

在每一顆黎明、每一個生命細節

不斷世界碰撞…

夜裡，夜裡，一個聲音在內心喚醒我

在每一縫微細、每一個生命細節

尋找秘密小徑、邁入新的土地

內在的花開明媚後

天 / 月 / 日 / 段

只有一種寧靜

從心裏深深葬起

一朵花一串串符一個清香的永生之歌

美到極緻—

無以言說的「一、你」

一粒沙 — 一粒沙 — 一粒沙

在生與死的剎那

一粒沙開了

我喚一首人類之歌 / I Want to Sing a Song of Humankind

我喚一首人類之歌

讓在虛的大地掀起來！

我喚起人類的記憶

讓沈睡的夢再一次

閃動那顆心、尋找

碎去的夢之拼圖—

我知道愛的秘密軌道、

我捕捉愛生活的瞬間美麗，

我望夜海靜靜。

我喚一首人類之歌

讓在虛的大地掀起來！

我喚起人類的記憶

讓在虛的大地掀起來！

閃動那顆心、尋找

碎去的夢之拼圖—

—在某些平凡、華貴的時刻

我聽到許多聲音的神術—

嗨，當靈魂懂得安寧之後

彷彿在工作、生活當中而落伍

寫著我生命一樣呼吸

搖曳的春樹啊，總的不抵是記憶

散發的也不抵是清香

mg yo rama bli bang du nh di ching yin diupan

mg ng yi gao bu lu uog shing di ngi

ting shang di diu

mg ng shu ma bu shih li shing chi

mung shiui shi li, ng ng yin giing

chih bang diu bu lu ngi tong long

yi dih shiui sope

dia ngi long diu dih fang chi

djung gi yu dihgu di fo fang

shang di shia

I want to sing a song of humankind

To get the whole land from its slumber

I want to recall people's memories

So the lost childhood will once again,

With dark pupils flashing, seek to piece together

The jigsaw puzzles of shattered dreams.

I want to sing a song of humankind

To wake the great land from its slumber

I want to recall people's memories

So the lost childhood will once again,

With dark pupils flashing, seek to piece together

The jigsaw puzzles of shattered dreams.

Oh, when the soul regains its peace,

Ants will still work, woodpaint will still peel, and I

I shall breathe as the green grass does.

Oh, the waving spring grass! What is buried is not just memories

What is given out is more than fragrance.
ABSTRACT

THE SONG OF LIFE

For Soprano, Baritone, Chamber Choir and Chamber Orchestra

by

Ming-Hsiu Yen

Chair: Bright Sheng

The Song of Life, inspired by the requiem mass, is written with texts taken from Mandarin Chinese poetry by Taiwanese poet YANG Ping (b. 1957). The poems draw upon both Buddhist and Christian elements to convey the main idea, “Death is another form of rebirth.”

The first movement, Spring Grass, opens with a perfect fifth above a tritone in the low strings, along with the baritone singing modal melodic lines to express the melancholy toward the deceased life. In contrast, under the keywords, “I believe,” “death,” and “rebirth,” the music features leaps with strong rhythmic articulation. In the last section, the transformed melody from the beginning is set with imitations among voices to express the wavering of the spring grass, which symbolizes “rebirth.”

Stupa at the End of the World, is in an ABA form. In both A sections, trills, glissandos and upward gestures depict the scene of the Last Day in Christianity. In bars 117—145, the quasi-Bach-chorale is meant to satirize the idea that war is waged for the people, peace, love and freedom. In contrast, in the Lamento section, the strings provide a sensitive and emotional input. After the prayer in the chorus reaches an intense minor-major seventh chord, the C-sharp tutti elevates the prayer to a near-crying state.

Nothing Cannot, But an Aircraft, marked Scherzo, starts playfully with strings using artificial harmonics, trills, and pizzicatos, with the soprano singing with glissandos with dramatic dynamic changes. Later in the lyric sections, the use of harmonics and glissandos with seagull effects in the strings are used to depict one’s inner world. The playful and flowing character reaches its final climax at the beginning of the fourth movement.

The fourth movement, I Want to Sing a Song of Humankind, transforms the negative images from the previous movements to a positive and passionate state by its romantic harmonic language. The melodic motif from bars 83—88 is transformed from the Lamento section of the second movement; the lyrics and the music from bar 143 are also taken from the end of the first movement to further emphasize “spring grass.”
The Song of Life

I. Spring Grass

Pesante, \( \approx 96-100 \)

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Transposed Score

Spring Grass

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B

Bassoon

Horn in F I

Horn in F II

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Tuba

Timpani

Snare Drum

Baritone Solo

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Violin

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

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accel. .......................... Piu Mosso ($\circ = 138$)

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in B

Bar.

Hn. in F I

Hn. in F II

Tpt. in C

Tbn.

Tba.

Timp.

S. D.

S.

A.

T.

B.

accel. .......................... Piu Mosso ($\circ = 138$)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.
Hn. in F II
Tpt. in C
Cl. in B
Bsn.
Ob.
Vln. II
Timp.
Vln. I
S.
T.
Vc.
A.
(senza sord.)
(pizz.)
(A)n
(dwan)
(tsu,
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. in B
Bsn.
Hn. in F
Hn. in F II
Tpt. in C
Tbn.
Tba.
Timp.
S. D.
Bar.
S.
A.
T.
B.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.

mf
f
mp
p

shü
er
chü,
gō,
sou,
shü
er
chü,
gō,
sou,
Meno Mosso, \( \frac{3}{8} = 88 \)
II. Stupa at the End of the World

Con brio, Allegro \( \frac{3}{4} \) = 144

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B♭

Bassoon

Horn in F I

Horn in F II

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Tuba

Timpani

Snare Drum

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Con brio, Allegro \( \frac{3}{4} \) = 144

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
\[ \text{Fl.} \]
\[ \text{Ob.} \]
\[ \text{Cl. in B} \]
\[ \text{Bsn.} \]
\[ \text{Hn. in F I} \]
\[ \text{Hn. in F II} \]
\[ \text{Tpt. in C} \]
\[ \text{Tbn.} \]
\[ \text{Tba.} \]
\[ \text{Timp.} \]
\[ \text{S. D.} \]
\[ \text{S.} \]
\[ \text{A.} \]
\[ \text{T.} \]
\[ \text{B.} \]
\[ \text{Vln. I} \]
\[ \text{Vln. II} \]
\[ \text{Vla.} \]
\[ \text{Vc.} \]
\[ \text{Cb.} \]
Lamento, $q = 72$

172

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in B.

Bsn.

Hn. in F I

Hn. in F II

Tpt. in C

Tbn.

Tba.

Timp.

S. D.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Lamento, $q = 72$

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
III. Nothing Cannot, But an Aircraft

沒有什麼不是飛行器
Fl.
f
Ob.

Cl. in B-

Bsn.

Hn. in F I

Hn. in F II

Tpt. in C

Tbn.

Tba.

Mar.
f

S.

yi tigo ba bu lioshang da hai,

- 淞 间 不 流 向 大 海,

tian shang di shia,

- 天 上 地 下,

Vln. I

f

arco

pizz.

Vln. II

f

arco

pizz.

Vla.

f

arco

Vc.

f

arco

pizz.

Cb.

mf

f
趨進強，
在每一個黎明，
每一個生命。

chùshìliú wǒ,
zhèi ěr yī gè lí míng,
měi yī gè shēng mìng shùiūn

Fl.
Ob.
Cl. in B
Bsn.
Hn. in F I
Hn. in F II
Tpt. in C
Tbn.
Tba.
Mar.
S.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

呼
wo
呼
wan
在
街
口,
条
街
口,
呼
wan
wo
呼
wan
在
街
口,
条
街
口,
在死亡进入身体的刹那，进入身体的
IV. I Want to Sing a Song of Humankind

我要唱一首人類之歌

Con brio, \( \mathcal{J} = 72-76 \)
Poco Piu Mosso (\( \dot{\omega} = 84-92 \))

- Fl.
- Ob.
- Cl. in B.
- Bar.
- Hn. in F I
- Hn. in F II
- Tpt. in C
- Tba.
- Vln. I
- Vln. II
- S.
- T.
- B.
- S.
- T.
- B.
- S.
- T.
- B.

- Fl.
- Vn.
- Vn. II
- Vla.
- Vc.
- Cb.
- Vc.
- Cl.

- Vc.
- Cl.

- Poco Piu Mosso (\( \dot{\omega} = 84-92 \))

\( \dot{\omega} \) represents the tempo, with values indicating a range from 84 to 92 beats per minute.
Più mosso
Cantabile, $j = 104$
Meno mosso, \( \text{\textit{d} \textbar \textmark{\textit{=}} \text{\textmark{\textit{72}}}} \)

\[ \text{\textmark{240} \textmark{241} \textmark{243}} \]

\[ \text{pp} \]

\[ \text{\textmark{Meno mosso, \textmark{\textit{d} \textbar \textmark{\textit{=}} \text{\textmark{\textit{72}}}}}} \]

\[ \text{\textmark{pp}} \]

\[ \text{\textmark{pp}} \]

\[ \text{\textmark{pp}} \]