Ten Thousand Rivers of Oil

program note

Ten Thousand Rivers of Oil was commissioned by Marta McCarthy for the University of Guelph. Marta suggested the Old Testament words of the prophet Micah; the poetry by George Whipple was my choice. Micah's voice is unfortunately not out of date; I am struck by the fact that we are often in danger of justifying our actions as appeasing some god or another, when what is really required is to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. Whipple's poetry puts the searchlight on the problem—the god who requires rivers of oil is actually the one we see in the mirror (Whipple's words are: "What we've done is ... changed God to man...) Material sacrifice is not required by Micah's God; our own us-god requires this sacrifice, to lubricate an often aggressively achieved and similarly maintained privileged lifestyle. Again, Whipple's poetry distills that fact.

In its four movements, the texts of this work (1) ask a fundamental lifestyle question (Micah), (2) put before us the historic reality of forcefully gained advantage (Whipple), (3) call us to consider love as the true generating energy of our world (Whipple), and (4) present a way forward, through justice, mercy, and humility.

For myself, as a composer living in a privileged society, there is simply no escaping the profound ironies in all of this. While I had events such as the Gulf War(s) on my mind during this project, the month of completion (May 2010) was also the time of a major oil well rupture and potential ecological disaster in another gulf, that of Mexico. These events are part of the complex tragedy that supports my lifestyle.

While I am thankful to my institution, Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo, for the composition sabbatical in winter of 2010, I am especially grateful for the two periods of composition residency in January and May 2010 in the Leighton Colony at the Banff Centre for the Arts, a wonderful and inspiring haven maintained by oil-rich Alberta. This was a gift of time and seclusion. Still, and always, *Kyrie eleison*.

Leonard Enns Cardinal Studio, Leighton Colony Banff Centre for the Arts 17 May 2010

premiered by the University of Guelph Choirs, Marta McCarthy conductor, 27 November 2010, Guelph, Ontario

with thanks to:

- Conrad Grebel University College, for granting the sabbatical that made this project possible.
- the Banff Centre for the Arts, where I was a Leighton Colony Artist in January and May of 2010. Much of the work on this project was conceived and completed there in the Cardinal Studio.
- Marta McCarthy, whose convictons, encouragement, inspiration and determination started the whole project.
- George Whipple, whose poetry has been music for me, and whose words have been new doorways to enduring truths. Thanks for allowing me to muddle with your work, George.

First Movement

"With what shall I come"

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

--Micah: 6:6&7 (biblical: public domain)

Second Movement

"The Price of Oil"

What we've done is past recall-changed God to man to children dying for the price of oil.

Compounding the offence, the more the dead are coffined up the more must die in recompense

while bombs outbid
the body for the soul
of him who can
no longer battle for
the price of oil.

--George Whipple (used by permission of GW) from *Swim Class and Other Poems*

Third Movement

"Evolution"

How did the world evolve from rock to leaf to cells with souls except by love?

How did loam become a rose and the scent thereof like rising prayer evolve except by love;

and how do those in ghetto graves evolve into transparent souls entering gift homes above except by love?

--George Whipple (used by permission of GW) from *The Colour of Memory and Other Poems*

Fourth Movement

"O people"

O people, what does the Lord require of you? I have shown you what is good. To live justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

--based on Micah: 6:8 (biblical: public domain)

Commissioned by the University of Guelph

performance duration: 25 minutes

all performance materials are available from

Monarda Music
63 Dorset Street
Waterloo, Ontario
Canada N2L 3M1
email <info@monardamusic.ca>

Ten Thousand Rivers of Oil

text: Micah 6:6&7

for choir, organ, flute, oboe, cello, timpani, percussion (gong, bass drum, glockenspiel), harp

Commissioned by the University of Guelph through the generosity of Dr. James C. E. Fuller (1927-2008)

First Movement With what shall I come?

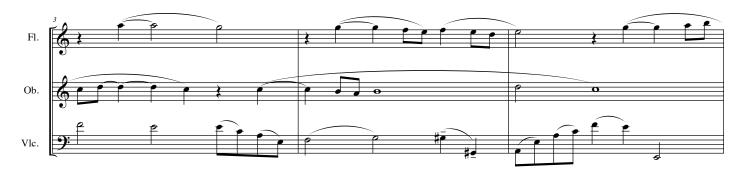
Leonard Enns

choir, organ, flute, oboe, cello, timpani, gong



Total duration: ca. 25'

First Movement duration: ca. 6'











Second Movement

The price of oil

choir, organ, flute, oboe, cello, timpani, percussion (gong, bass drum), harp

Leonard Enns





Second Movement duration: ca. 5'40"





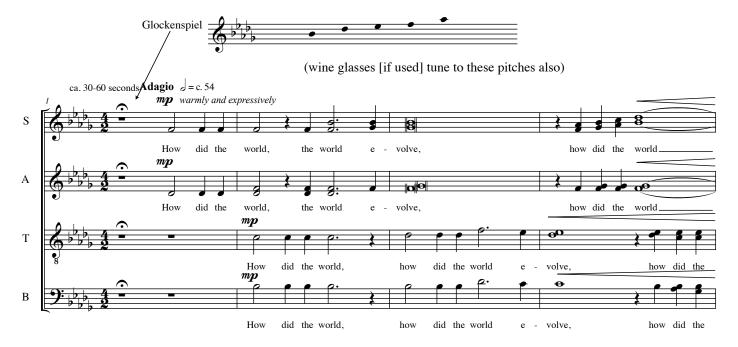
Third Movement **Evolution**

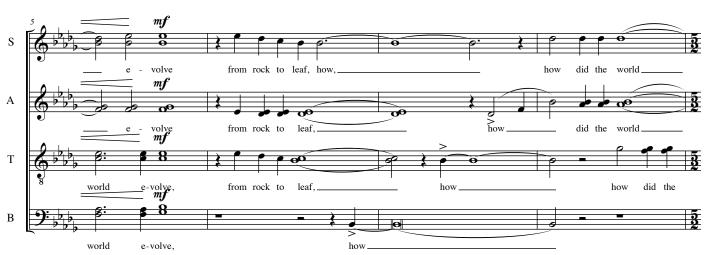
text: George Whipple "Evolution"

Leonard Enns

choir, glockenspiel (or marimba or xylophone); optional tuned wine glasses (may be played by singers) or acappella

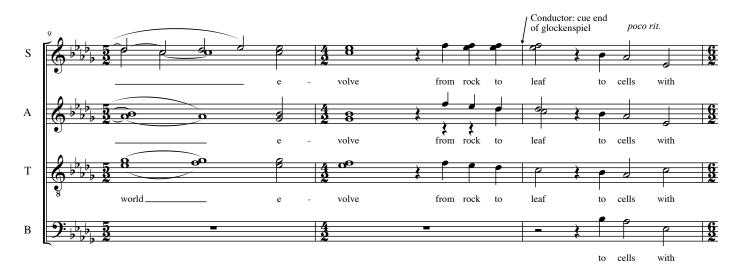
Glockenspiel: improvise on these pitches; mostly single notes, any octave; include occasional diads; space notes approx. 2 to 5 seconds apart; always just barely audible; this should be very peaceful; toward the end of the movement the same pitches are bowed rather than struck. Begin at the conductor's cue, while the final note of the previous movement is still sounding; improvise for 30 to 60 seconds before the choir begins, and continue for about 30 seconds while the choir is singing, gradually increasing time intervals between notes.

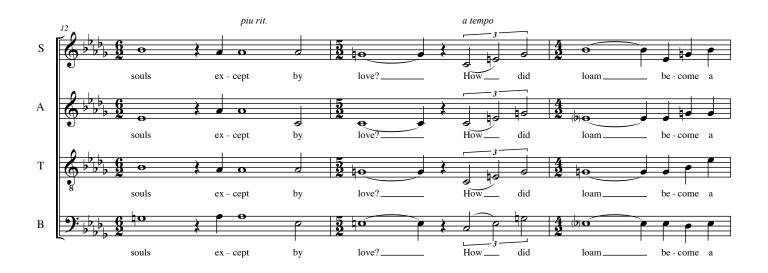


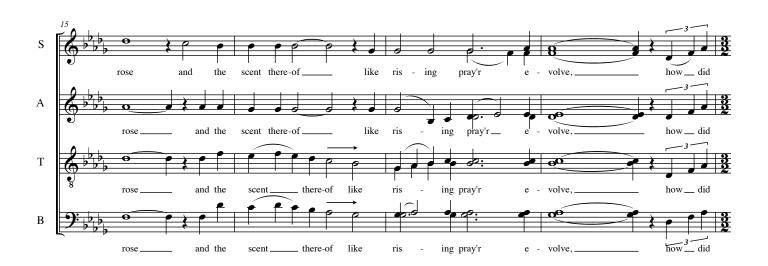


Performance NOTE: the wine glasses, if used, are to be "rung" in the normal party fashion, by a wet finger rubbed on the rim. Tune them to the same pitches as the Glockenspiel, with water or wine. The ideal is occasional tones of about 5 - 10 seconds, with comfortable spacing between the individual tones. Different pitches may overlap. Experiment for the best effect.

Third Movement duration: ca. 4' - 5' with instruments; ca. 3'30" acappella









*NOTE: a large note-head indicates a brief "blooming" of your note (< mf >). The overall effect should be of a sound-stream rising through the texture

Fourth Movement O people

Score

Micah 6:8

text:

choir, organ, flute, oboe, cello, timpani, percussion (bass drum), harp

Leonard Enns

Flute Oboe Cello Timpani Bass Drum Harp Soprano O, peo -Alto O, Tenor Bass O, О Organ

Fourth Movement duration: ca. 6'15"

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