A Child of Bethlehem

A Biblical Tale

Words: Phillip Dalziel  Music: Neil Carey

A Chamber Opera for

Soprano

Actor

Greek Chorus

Instruments
A Child of Bethlehem, A Biblical Tale

In Rama was there a voice heard
Lamentation, and weeping, and great
Mourning, Rachel weeping for her
Children, and would not be comforted, because they are not

Matthew, chapter 2 vs 18

I had not heard of this story until it was brought to my attention by Neil Carey. Like many people the other, more hopeful story was the one I had heard of.

It got me thinking of all the stories that although are told are drowned out by other ones, told in louder voices.

For Herod, in this piece, language is a way to mask what is happening. Keep talking and no one else gets a look in. Politicians today are taught to do just that in interviews and discussions. Do not allow any time for a question to be put or a point to be raised. Even to the point of inarticulacy.

It seems odd to me that only one mother's name is mentioned in connection with the holocaust of children that occurred over the duration of the Nativity. This omission seems horrific and so insensitive given the context of today, when the media the church and the state are trying to recalibrate the way we report and speak about such atrocities. Putting the victims at the centre of a report is now the done thing, allowing them a voice a necessity.

However frail, quiet or nervous that voice is this opera is an honouring of those unheard and an indictment of those who will not shut up when strong emotions or moments of intimacy loom.

If anything can honour and hold gently the deep feelings of grief and despair that arise due to appalling acts of horror – music can. Music being a way to make articulate the souls inarticulacy. For, as another playwright says "attention to be proud".

Phillip Dalziel, March 2015
Instrumentation

Score in C

**Flute**

**Clarinet in Bb**

**Percussion (two players)**
Three suspended cymbals
Three pitched drums
Xylophone
Glockenspiel
Tubular Bells

**Soprano** – Rachel

**Actor** – Herod

**Greek Chorus** – Herod’s councilors

**Piano**

**Violin**

‘Cello

First performed in Sharnbrook school theatre, Bedfordshire on the 28th June 2015.

Katherine MacRae – Rachel
Francis Kennedy – Herod
Michael Cartledge and Matthew Perren – Herod’s councilors
Dr K Sextet
David Knight – Conductor
Performance Directions

Chorus

The chorus, whether subdivided as indicated, or as a whole, must chant the words in unison. There are rhythmic indications in Chorus 1, these are provided as a guide only to aid the two and three lines of layered text. Any suitable solution is fine. After Chorus 1, the words should be chanted as a pulse and should be spoken within the section of the score as indicated. The conductor and director may edit the music to fit by cutting bars not needed or repeating bars as needed.

Rachel

The ossia soprano parts are original. The indicated soprano part is adapted after consultation with the performer for the first performance.

Herod

Herod’s words should be spoken and “acted” within the section indicated in the score. Again, the conductor and director have the freedom to edit the score as necessary to fit the word within the indicated sections.

Percussion

The three pitched drums could be three different pitched tom toms, the three suspended cymbals should be of different sizes. Both sets of instruments share the same three lined stave, with an indication of instrument change.

Two players will be needed.
A Child of Bethlehem, A Nativity

A chamber opera
Music – Neil Carey
Words – Phillip Dalziel

Libretto
(Herod on stage with blooded hands)

Chorus 1

All chorus

Each name is recorded
From father to son
Each name is recorded
From father to son
For ever and ever
Recorded in time
For ever and ever
Names are recorded
For ever and ever

Phares
begat
Zara
begat
Naasson
begat
Thamar
begat
Salmon
begat
Roboam
begat
Josaphat
begat
Joram

From father to son
Recorded in time
Recorded in time
Recorded in time

For ever and ever
For ever and ever
For ever and ever
Recorded in time

Chorus member

Fourteen generations
Uninterrupted
Fourteen generations
Never one corrupted
Until now

Three chorus members

In Bethlehem
We have heard

All chorus

One is born
Born king of all
One is born in Bethlehem
King of all

This is has been fortold
Part of chorus
  Has been
All cast
  Fortold

Song 1
Rachel (who has been on stage throughout with child in arms)
  Buds will bloom again
  The spring returns
  The world in precious cycles spins
  What lessons will
  This world learn
  Now that a child’s life begins

Instrumental interlude 1
Herod monologue 1
Herod (washing blood from hands - spoken)
  I am not afraid
  Not afraid of the child’s cry
  The squeak form the door left ajar
  The pencil rolling from the table top onto the marble floor
  I am not afraid
  I am – do not interrupt
  - do not look down, your looking down tells me
  You should be slain as traitors – do you
  Want to be slain as traitors?
(Chorus look up)
  Hold the gaze, the gaze is important. The gaze is
  The difference between lying dead in a pool
  Of blood as black bodied flies buzz around the
  Sticky mess
  Your gaze I say is the difference
  Between that and a teacup offered with a
  Biscuit at 11 o’clock
  Do you see how important it is to
  Have a steady gaze? I am afraid you are
  Losing your grip you must always keep a
  Firm grip around your enemies

Chorus 2
Chorus
  All was fortold
  A star above the town of Bethlehem
  A star in the east of Judaea
**Song 2**

**Rachel**

Each blossomed rose  
Heralds summer’s here  
The growing child walks on his own  
Reaching out for  
Someone near  
Not you my love, you’ll never be alone

**Herod monologue 2**

**Herod (spoken)**

I am not afraid. Not afraid of dark skies  
Overly bright stars – star, let us be precise  
We are talking of one pinpointed light beam  
Am I correct?  
A single star that  
A child could abolish with its sticky hand  
Held aloft like so (does so) see? I can -  
Could do it and I am no child  
See one hand held aloft – I no longer  
See the light  
If a star  
Can cause such a stir as simple as a  
Paddle in water, as an oar through water  
Then we must prevent  
It, prevent this disturbance, this swell  
Of unrest

**Song 3**

**Rachel**

The rose it weeps  
At autumns golden touch  
Only now can I explain  
Why the cruel thorns  
Hurt so – so very much  
Let my tears come  
And wash you like the rain
Herod monologue 3

Herod

Hope is corrosive – have I told you this before?
Interrupt me if I have said this before. Corrosive.
It leads to change. Change which is uncalled for,
unasked for. I do not ask for it so do not give it
To me. This star is uncalled for.
It portends you say, portends a child? A child
Born. Well that is of no consequence to me
Children are born every day. This day for example
This star, uncalled for, portends, many children
Will be born – you may contradict me here
Do not let it be said that I cannot handle
Opposition.
Well done your
Gazes, your collective gaze is steady, that is
Good that is useful it tells me there is no
Contradiction.

Song 4

Rachel

Again buds will bloom
Sweet spring revives
The colour in every rose
The seasons turn
A hundred new young lives
And on the cycle
Goes and on the cycle goes

Herod monologue 4

Herod

There are so many uses for a handkerchief, a white
handkerchief. Mopping the brow of sweat, cleaning
And wiping away spilt milk. Mothers often
Spill milk, children spill milk. There, another
Use - wiping children’s mouths we do not want
To see what spills from children’s mouths
Tie the handkerchief, when all is done and tie it
Around the gate post like a flag so many will
Appear like bunting in a fair that should
Cheer the older children they will enjoy
The sense of carnival
The bunting flapping
Will help to smother any sound that
Might frighten
Now make sure your gaze is steady. I have
Always – even as a child – always been able
To gaze directly at what was needed to be looked
At – what was needed to be done

**Instrumental interlude 2**

**Chorus 2**

**Chorus**

Clear – yes
Look, look
Look how the motes of dust
The grains of dirt, dance
In that bright shaft of light there

**One chorus member**

I have to say I - -

**Chorus**

Look, look
Look how the starling cocks its head
Its eye down turned against the worm
In that bright shaft of light there

**Second chorus member**

I have to say....... 

**Chorus**

Look
The world continues
Mote of dust, grain of dirt

**One chorus member**

I.......  

**Chorus**

Worms turning the earth
To rich dark soil

**Both chorus members**

I have to say I –

**Chorus group 1**

We cannot say what part we play
In all of this

**Chorus group 2**

Our names will not be recorded
Our names will not be recorded
Chorus group 1
    We will not say what part we played
    We will not say what part we played

One chorus member
    I have to

Second chorus member
    Have to say that

Chorus
    No names will be recorded
    The dust will settle on our names
    Our bones will turn to unmarked dirt

One chorus member
    I have to say – look how
    The starling cocks its head

Second chorus member
    I,
    That bright shaft of light there

Chorus (soft)
    Our mothers
    Will scrape and wash the gristle from our swords
    Will cry out our names, they will
    Cry out our names

Chorus group 1 (draw out white handkerchiefs)

Chorus group 2
    So many, uses

Chorus group 1
    So much disturbance

Chorus
    The world will continue
    dust and dirt

(They wipe their hands)
    The world will continue
    Look, look etc

(A strong white light bathes Herod for a second and then goes off as a gentle warm glow lands on Rachel)

Instrumental interlude 3 (Transition from chorus to Rachel’s final song)
Song 5 – “Rachel's Lament”
Rachel
Rest now, rest now
Do not look upon this world
That did not welcome you
With outstretched arms
It was not you they were afraid of
Rest now, rest now
The angels never more will sleep
But they will welcome you
With outstretched arms
It will be you they will be running to
Rest now, rest now
You will never see the sun set red against the sky
You will never smell the wine red roses
You will never hear in my voice the cry.......
Never hear my voice
You will never see the evil all men do
Quick run, the angel’s will hold out their arms for you
You will not hear the women as they weep
Nor hear the cries from mothers bereft of sleep
Our knotted blood
Curls through the entrails
Of our dark cord
What sinew tangled mass
Heaves in our empty throats?
We will not rest now, we will not rest now
Till blade of iron cuts through
The twisted purple crown
That did this dead
We will not rest now (her own cry)
Rest now, rest now (to her dead child)
We will not rest now (her own cry)
Rest now, rest now (to her dead child)
Final chorus

No name will be recorded
No names will be recorded
But the sound of mothers’ cries
Will not leave the universe
But will travel down
Through generations and generations
Listen, listen
The cries of generations
Of women and their children
Listen, listen
Cries of generations
Of women and their children
Down the generations
Of women and their children
A blood chord as long as time_______
Listen, listen
A blood chord as long as time_______
\[ \sum \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} = 0 \]

\[ \sum \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} = 0 \]

\[ \sum \frac{\partial f}{\partial z} = 0 \]

\[ \sum \frac{\partial f}{\partial t} = 0 \]
Herod monologue One

[88]

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---110
Song 3 - “The dark rose fades”
The ToolVCbrioloe

vi

Violin

3°
The Choral, no rit.  

Clarinet in Bb  

Three pitched drums  

Tuba/bass drum  

Racquet  

Flute  

Violin  

Viola  

Cello