Edward Nesbit

Songs for a Dying World
SONGS FOR A DYING WORLD

EDWARD NESBIT

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INSTRUMENTATION

2 Clarinets in B♭ (II = Bass Clarinet in B♭)
2 Horns in F
Harp
Soprano
2 Violins I
2 Violins II
2 Violas
2 Violoncelli
1 Double Bass

Duration c. 27'
Score in C

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PERFORMANCE NOTE

Grace notes should be played before the beat.

PROGRAMME NOTE

*Songs for a Dying World* is a set of six songs which explore the passing of time and the destruction that time brings. The first, third and fifth songs set extracts of Isaiah 24, and present apocalyptic visions of the end of the world. The remaining three songs, all settings of Percy Bysshe Shelley, describe ruins and reflect on the lost glory of fallen civilisations. The fourth song sets the famous poem 'Ozymandias', which depicts the shattered remains of a statue of a once-great king. The second and sixth songs set extracts from Shelley's long poem 'Queen Mab', including a passage about Palmyra, chosen in order to explore its obvious contemporary resonances.

The world in which we live is a precarious one, and it is the insecurity of human existence - above all the looming threat of climate catastrophe - which prompted me to write *Songs for a Dying World*. The piece does not deal with these threats directly, however, and is rather a meditation on the transience of all human endeavour written in a time of uncertainty.
Songs for a Dying World

Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.

'Behold,' [the Fairy cried,]
'Palmyra's ruined palaces!
Behold where grandeur frowned!
Behold where pleasure smiled!
What now remains?—the memory
Of senselessness and shame.
What is immortal there?
Nothing—it stands to tell
A melancholy tale, to give
An awful warning; soon
Oblivion will steal silently
The remnant of its fame.
Monarchs and conquerors there
Proud o'er prostrate millions trod—
The earthquakes of the human race;
Like them, forgotten when the ruin
That marks their shock is past.'

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on those lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The new wine mourneth, the vine languiseth, all the merryhearted do sigh.
The mirth of the tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth.
They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.
The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in.
There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone.
In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.

Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth.
And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.
The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.
The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.

Where Athens, Rome, and Sparta stood,
There is a moral desert now.
The mean and miserable huts,
The yet more wretched palaces,
Contrasted with those ancient fanes
Now crumbling to oblivion,—
The long and lonely colonnades
Through with the ghost of Freedom stalks,—
Seem like a well-known tune,
Which in some dear scene we have loved to hear,
Remembered now in sadness.

Isaiah 24:1, 7-12, 17-20 (King James Version)

Ozymandias
Queen Mab: Part II (extracts)
(Percy Bysshe Shelley)
Songs for a Dying World

I

EDWARD NESBIT

Soprano

Be- hold, the Lord mak- eth the earth emp- ty, and mak- eth it waste, and

Piano

Turn- eth it up- side down, and lea- ter- eth a- broad the in-

Violin

Ha- bi- tants there- of. Be- hold, be- hold, be- hold,

Segue
II - Palmyra

wherever possible throughout this movement.
NB Use open string for pizzicato notes wherever possible throughout this movement.

Be hold,
Cl.  
Hp.  
S.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  
Cl.  
Hp.  
S.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vc.  

Where pleasure smiled!

What remains?

sfz sfz sfz sfz

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

(pizz.)
Nothing - it stands to tell – A melancholy
to give an awful warning; -

soon oblivion will steal silently the remnant of its fame.
The earthquakes of the human race
That marks their shock is past.
The mirth of tabrets ceased the noise of

2. SOLO strike body of instrument
They shall not drink wine with a song.
strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.
The city of confusion is broken down...
ever y house is shut up, that no man may come in.
There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the...
land is gone.

(pizz.)
In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.

arm. nat. sul 1

arm. nat. sul 1
I met a traveler from an ancient land, Who said:

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert...
Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk,
a shat-tered vi-sage lies, whose frown, And wrink-led lip, and sneer

of cold com-mand, Tell that its sculp-tor well

2. muted, arco

3. pared, arco

(muted)
and the hour that fed:

pp

mf - f mp

poco pp mf - f mp - f mp mf
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco

without mute

(muted)

without mute

(muted)

without mute

(cresc. poco a poco)

(cresc. poco a poco)
the decay Of that colossal wreck, bound

loss and bare The lone and level sands

L stretch far away.
Fear, and the pit.
and the sinner, are upon thee,

O inhabitant,
And it shall come to pass,
from the noise of the fear shall
and he that cometh up out of the midst of the snare shall be taken in the snare.
for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations,
of the world do shake. The earth is
utterly broken down, the earth is
is moved
The earth shall reel to and fro.

(pizz.)
like a drunk-ard, - and shall be removed.
(d) like a cot tage; and the trans
Where Athens, Rome, and

remove mute

sul tasto

sul tasto
Sparta stood. There is a moral desert now. The mean and miserable

(pizz.)
huts, The________yet________more________wretched________pa________la________ces________Con________tras________ted________with________those

without mute

arco

(pizz.)
ancient fates, Now crumbling to oblivion. The long and lone-
ly

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

(pizz.)

arm. nat. sul IV

arm. nat. sul I

arco

arco

arco
Through which the ghost of Freedom stalks!
Cl.
Hn.
Hp.
S.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.

It seems like a well-known tune, which in some dear scene we have...
loved to hear,

Re-membered, now in sadness.