

ALEC ROTH

Shared Ground

Choral Suite
for unaccompanied double choir
SSATBB – SSATBB

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EDITION PETERS

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SHARED GROUND

Words by Vikram Seth

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DURATION: 23 minutes approx.

Performing SHARED GROUND with PONTICELLI

The six movements *Shared Ground* may be performed in alternation with the five movements of *Ponticelli* for solo violin by Alec Roth (EP73279). The total duration would then be about 45 minutes.

Shared Ground was commissioned jointly by the Salisbury, Chelsea and Lichfield Festivals with funds provided by the Arts Council of England and the PRS Foundation.

The first performances were given by Ex Cathedra directed by Jeffrey Skidmore, Wilton Church, 6 June; Holy Trinity Church, Chelsea, 21 June; Lichfield Cathedral, 10 July, 2006.

RECORDING

Shared Ground is recorded by Ex Cathedra, directed by Jeffrey Skidmore (together with *Ponticelli*, performed by Philippe Honoré), and is available on CD and as a digital download on the double album 'Shared Ground' on the Signum label (SIGCD270).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I first came across George Herbert's poetry in *The Albatross Book of Verse*, a copy of which had been given to my mother in Darjeeling on her eighteenth birthday. I requisitioned it and took it with me to my boarding school in Dehradun where I dipped into it from time to time. I liked Herbert's poems well enough, but was more taken at the time by his wordplay. It was some years later, when doing my English A-level at Tonbridge School that I came across him again: a selection of his poetry was one of our set texts.

I felt a great affinity for Herbert – for his clarity, his depth of feeling, his spiritual struggles, his delight in the pleasures of nature and music, his wit, his strange juxtapositions, his decorous colloquiality. Indeed, though I am neither Christian nor particularly religious, he is still among my favourite poets.

When, more than three decades later, I heard that his house near Salisbury was up for sale, I felt I had to visit it. I had no intention of buying it; I simply wanted to see the place where such poems as "Love" and "Virtue" had been written. I saw the house, felt its atmosphere, and – though I could not really afford to – made a bid for it. It struck me that had the house belonged to Donne or Milton or some other more overtly forceful personality, I would not have been able to live there. But Herbert, for all his depth and richness, is a clear writer and a tactful spirit. He might influence me but would not wish to wrest me from myself.

I bought the house in 2003. The garden runs down to the River Nadder, and the wood and water-meadows beyond form part of the grounds. At the beginning I felt his presence hourly, both within the house and outside. As time passed, I began to think of it as being somewhat more my own, but still, indefinably, shared.

Early in 2007, while I was in Delhi but thinking of Salisbury, I wrote the six poems of *Shared Ground*. Though the mood and spirit of these verses are my own, they are formally modelled on poems by Herbert: "Lost" on "Paradise"; "Oak" on "Easter Wings"; "And" on "Hope"; "Host" on "Love III"; "Flash" on "Virtue" and "This" on "Prayer I" – some of the loveliest of his poems, and among my favourites.

The texts were set to music by Alec Roth while he was staying at the house, during my absence in Delhi. The spirit of the place found its way into the music too, and in addition to setting the words for double choir, the composer wrote a set of dance-like pieces for solo violin (played by Philippe Honoré), each inspired by one of the five bridges in the grounds. The two works, *Shared Ground* and *Ponticelli* ("little bridges") are designed so that they can be performed separately or together. In the combined form, the six pieces of *Shared Ground* are linked by the five bridges of *Ponticelli*.

Vikram Seth

SHARED GROUND

1. LOST

Lost in a world of dust and spray,
We turn, we learn, we twist, we pray
For word or tune or touch or ray:

Some tune of hope, some word of grace,
Some ray of joy to guide our race,
Some touch of love to deuce our ace.

In vain the ace seeks out its twin.
The race is long, too short to win.
The tune is out, the word not in.

Our limbs, our hearts turn all to stone.
Our spring, our step lose aim and tone.
We are no more – and less than one.

There is no soul in which to blend,
No life to leave, no light to lend,
No shape, no chance, no drift, no end.

2. OAK

Last night a storm raged round the bare oak tree.
A cold, sharp rain fell; wild in pace
The ice-fed air swirled free.
Now in this place
I see
No trace
Of wind or lee,
No grass, no earth – the space
Is a clear lake, deep as my knee.
I reach its edge and view, far down, my face.

I wade out to the bench, set down my wine,
My bread and cheese, and like some sage
Of old, sit down to dine.
I do not rage
Or pine
At age,
For youth once mine.
This pool, this plate, this page,
This tree whose roots are branch and tine
Holds me in its still hour-glass, its free cage.

SHARED GROUND

Choral Suite for double choir (SSATBB – SSATBB)

1. Lost

Distant (♩ = ca.54?)

Cold, steady (♩ = ca.120)

CHOIR I CHOIR II CHOIR I

p *p* *mp*

Lost. Lost. Lost

CHOIR I CHOIR II

p *p*

Lost. Lost.

CHOIR I CHOIR II

p *p* niente (poco) (*pp*)

Lost. Lost. Lo lo lo [& c.]

CHOIR I CHOIR II

p *p* *pp*

Lost. Lost. Lo sssss t.

7 CHOIR I

in a world of dust and spray,

niente

pp

Lo

niente (poco) (*pp*)

Lo lo lo [& c.]

pp

Lo sssss t.

CHOIR II

mp

we turn, we learn, we

niente niente (poco)

Lo lo lo [& c.]

CHOIR I

14

mp

for word or tune or touch or ray:

niente *niente* (*poco*) (*pp*) (*poco*)

Lo lo lo [&c.]

pp Lo sssss t. *pp* Lo sssss t.

CHOIR II

niente *mp*

twist, we pray or touch or ray:

pp Lo

(*pp*) *niente* *niente* (*poco*)

Lo lo lo [&c.]

pp Lo sssss t. *pp* Lo sssss t.

CHOIR I & II **A** Rhythmic, incisive (same tempo)

(♩ = ca.120)

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mf (sim.)

Lost in a world of dust and spray, we turn, we learn,

mp Lo lo lo [&c.]

f (sim.)

Lost in a world of dust and spray, we turn, we learn, we

f (sim.)

Lost in a world of dust and spray, we turn, we learn, we

28

△ □ △ □ □ □ □ △ □

we twist we pray for word or tune or touch or ray:

twist we pray for word or tune or touch or ray:

twist we pray for word or tune or touch or ray:

35

B △ □ △ □ △ □

ff some tune of hope, some word of grace, some ray of joy

ff some tune of hope, some word of grace, some ray of joy

ff some tune of hope, some word of grace, some ray of joy to

ff some tune of hope, some word of grace, some ray of joy to

42

△ □ △ □

to guide our race, some touch of love to deuce our ace.

to guide our race, some touch of love to deuce our ace.

guide our race, some touch of love to deuce our ace.

guide our race, some touch of love to deuce our ace.