

Param Vir

HE BEGINS HIS GREAT TRANCE

for 8-part choir
(S S A A T T B B)

accompanied by 6 pairs of crotales
and 1 large Tam-Tam

Text by Rabindranath Tagore
Translated by William Radice

and incorporating
the Sanskrit Rig-Vedic Creation Hymn “*Nasadiya*”

Perusal Score
www.paramvir.net

2008

This 8-part choral version was commissioned by BBC Radio 3
for the BBC Singers

First performance on 4 July 2008 at the City of London Festival
by the BBC Singers conducted by James Morgan

This version is based on the earlier work "Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva" for 6 solo voices, commissioned by the London
Sinfonietta, and first performed on 21 May 1988 at Queen Elizabeth Hall

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'Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva' (92 lines) from RABINDRANATH TAGORE: SELECTED POEMS
translated by William Radice (Penguin, 1985) © William Radice, 1985.
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Duration: circa 21 minutes

I. THE DARK

In a worldless timeless lightless great emptiness
Four-faced Brahma broods.

*nasad asin, no sad asit tadanim;
nasid raja no vioma paro yat.
kim avarivah? kuha? kasya sarmann?
Ambhah kim asid, gahanam gabhiram?*

*na mytur asid, amrtam na tarhi.
na ratria ahna asit pratekh.
anid avatam svadhaya tad ekam.
tasmad dhanyan na parah kim canasa.*

*tama asit tamasa gudham agre;
apraketam salilam sarvam a idam.
tuchyenabhu apihitam yad asit,
tapasas tan mahinajayataikam.*

Of a sudden sea of joy surges through his heart -
The ur-god opens his eyes.
Speech from four mouths
Speeds from each quarter.
Through infinite dark,
Through limitless sky,
Like a growing sea-storm,
Like hope never sated
His Word starts to move.

Stirred by joy his breath quickens,
His eight eyes quiver with flame.
His fire-matted hair sweeps the horizon,
Bright as a million suns.

From the towering source of the world
In a thousand streams
Cascades the primeval blazing fountain,
Fragmenting silence,
Splitting its stone heart.

*kamas tad agre sam avartatadhi
manaso retah prathamam yad asit?
sato bandhum asati nir avindan
hrdi pratisya kavayo manisa*

II. THE MUSIC

In a universe rampant
With new life exhalant,
With new life exultant,
Vishnu spreads wide
His four-handed blessing.
He raises his conch
And all things quake
At its booming sound.
The frenzy dies down,
The furnace expires,
The planets douse
Their flames with tears,
The world's Divine Poet
Constructs its history,
From wild cosmic song
Its epic is formed.
Stars in their orbits,
Moon sun and planets -
He binds with his mace
All things to Law,
Imposes the discipline
Of metre and rhyme.

In the Manasa depths
Vishnu watches -
Beauties arise
From the light of lotuses.
Lakshmi strews smiles -
Clouds show a rainbow,
Gardens show flowers.
The roar of Creation
Resolves into music.
Softness hides rigour,
Forms cover power.

*tirascino vitato rasmir esam:
adhah svid asid, upari svid asit?
retodha asan, mahimana asan;
svadha avasat, prayatih parastat.*

Age after age after age is slave to a mighty rhythm -
At last the world-frame
Tires in its body,
Sleep in its eyes
Slackens its structure,
Diffuses its energy.
From the heart of all matter
Comes the anguished cry -
'Wake, wake, great Shiva,
Our body grows weary
Of its law-fixed path,
Give us new form.
Sing our destruction,
That we gain new life.'

III. THE FIRE

The great god awakes,
His three eyes open,
He surveys all horizons.
He lifts his bow, his fell pinaka,
He pounds the world with his tread.
From first things to last it trembles and shakes
And shudders.
The bonds of nature are ripped.
The sky is rocked by the roar
Of a wave of ecstatic release.
An inferno soars -
The pyre of the universe.

Shattered sun and moon, smashed stars and planets,
Rain down from all angles,
A blackness of all particles
To be swallowed by flame,
Absorbed in an instant.
At the start of Creation
There was a dark without origin,
At the breaking of Creation
There is fire without end
In an all-pervading sky-engulfing sea of burning
Shiva shuts his three eyes.
He begins his great trance.

*ko adha veda? Ka iha pravocat,
kuta ajata, kuta iyam visrstih?
arvag deva asya visajanena:
atha ko veda yata ababhuvu?*

*iyam visrstir yata ababhuvu;
yadi vasa dadhe yadi van na:
yo asyadyaksah parame vioman
so anga veda, yadi va na veda.*

THE CREATION HYMN 'NASADIYA'

There was neither what is, nor what is not. There was no sky, nor space beyond the sky. What moved? Where? By whose will? Was there a gulf of water?

There was neither death nor immortality then; no sign of day or night.
The ONE breathed by its own force, in deep stillness. There was nothing other than the one.

Darkness hid darkness; nothing was distinct; everything was fluid. Then, out of nothing, the One, by will-power, warmed itself into life.

Desire grew in it, the first seed of mind. Sages sought in their heart with wisdom, found a bond between being and non-being.

They extended the bond. Was there below? Was there above? Seed was given from above, to powers stirring below.

Who truly knows? Who can say whence and how this universe began?
The gods came later: who therefore knows whence came Creation.

Only the god who watches from highest heaven knows the origin of the origin of the universe, knows if it was made or not made; or perhaps he does not know.

Rig-Veda X.129, c.1000 B.C.
(Translated by William Radice)

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Taking my earlier setting of Tagore's 'Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva' (which was commissioned by the London Sinfonietta Voices in 1988) as a starting point, I made this new setting for 8-part choir, accompanied by six pairs of crotales and one tam-tam, for the BBC Singers and the City of London Festival. There are three sections:

I The Dark

II The Music

III The Fire

I was drawn to this text not only for its direct and dramatic account of creation, preservation and destruction, the principle attributes respectively of the three gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) featured in the poem by Tagore, but equally for its pointed and vivid imagery involving sound and music. The musical references, which form the heart of the middle movement, are not all surprising, coming as they do from a poet who was also a renowned composer. My work takes its title from the last line in Tagore's poem.

The dramatic shape of the poem is that of an inverted arch. The most active and frenzied passages of 'The Dark' (Brahma) and 'The Fire' (Shiva) at the beginning and towards the end form the pillars which cradle the central 'The Music' (Vishnu) section, where the "roar of Creation resolves into music", subsiding to quiet expression in a passage for crotales, organised polyrhythmically to give metaphorical allusion to "the discipline of metre and rhyme". I have used, for this setting, the English translation of the poem by William Radice. To frame Tagore's poem, and also to offer it an oblique commentary, I have interleaved with it the ancient Rig-Vedic Creation Hymn *Nasadiya* which, because it is removed from the epic, cataclysmic drive of Tagore's narrative (maintaining instead the quiet, serene presence of a Sanskrit chant) directs us to more fundamental and searching questions about the nature and origins of Creation.

He Begins His Great Trance, like its forerunner *Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva* is dedicated to my mother Khurshid Mehta, who was an accomplished classical Indian musician, and to whose early inspiration and example I owe my music.

SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION KEY

a short, as in English 'shut'

ā long, as in Italian 'pace'

Note that 'Brahma' has a short 'a' in the first syllable and a long 'a' in the second.
The 'h' lengthens the 'm' or is lightly sounded *after* the 'm': 'Bram-ma' or 'Bram-ha'.

i short, as in English 'fit'

Note that 'Shiva' has a short 'i' and a short 'a', like English 'shiver'.

ī long, as in Italian 'triste'

u short, as in English 'put'

ū long, as in Italian 'fumo'

ṛ pronounced as 'ri'

e o pure, as in Italian, not as in English 'break' or 'boat', where the vowels are diphthongs

c an unaspirated 'ch' sound, as in English 'peach'

ṭ like an English 't'

t d softly dental, as in Italian or French

r rolled, as in Scots or Italian

ś ṣ as in English 'shine'

s as in English 'send'; never voiced as in English 'is'

ḥ a breathy 'h' sound, following vowels rather as in Scots 'loch' or German 'ich' but without any guttural quality; the preceding vowel can be echoed slightly (-taha -tiha etc.)

Other sounds as in English, but 'h' after consonants (ch- th- dh- etc.) must be clearly pronounced, and consonants not followed by 'h' (k- p- etc.) should *not* be aspirated. 'ṁ' (amṛtaṁ kiṁ, etc.) is a nasal sound which should change according to the sound following it: if expert guidance is not available, sing it as 'm'.

Performance Note

CROTALES

Player 1
(Sop. 1)



Player 2
(Sop. 2)



Player 3
(Alt. 1)



Player 4
(Alt. 2)



Player 5
(Ten. 2)



Player 6
(Bass 2)



Six of the singers each play on a pair of Crotales, on pitches specified above. These instruments should be fixed on a stand before each of the singers and played with a pair of metal beaters. The sound is two octaves higher than written. Rhythmic values in the Crotales part indicate only the point of attack, not the duration. The sound should always last as long as possible, until it dies naturally.

for my mother Khurshid Mehta

HE BEGINS HIS GREAT TRANCE

I. THE DARK

Text:
RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Transl. William Radice

Music:
PARAM VIR
2008

Very still ♩ = 54c.

musical score for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto 1, and Alto 2. The lyrics are: "In a world - less time - less light - less great".

Performance instructions: *pp*, *senza vib.*, *legato*. Includes triplets and slurs.

musical score for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto 1, and Alto 2. The lyrics are: "emp - ti - ness. Four - faced Brah - mā".

Performance instructions: *pp*, *senza vib.*, *legato*. Includes triplets and slurs.

musical score for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto 1, and Alto 2. The lyrics are: "broods.".

Performance instructions: *pp*, *senza vib.*. Includes slurs.

musical score for Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Bass 1, and Bass 2. The lyrics are: "Nā - sad ā - sīn no sad ā - sīt ta - dā - nīm; Nā - sīd ra - jo no vi - o - ma pa - ro yat.".

Performance instructions: *pp*, *senza vib.*. Includes slurs.

15

T. 1
Kim - ā - va - rī - vaḥ ? ku - ha ? kas - ya śār - mann ? Am - bhaḥ kim - ā - sīd, ga - ha - naṃ ga - bhī -

B. 1
Kim - ā - va - rī - vaḥ ? ku - ha ? kas - ya śār - mann ? Am - bhaḥ kim - ā - sīd, ga - ha - naṃ ga - bhī -

B. 2
Kim - ā - va - rī - vaḥ ? ku - ha ? kas - ya śār - mann ? Am - bhaḥ kim - ā - sīd, ga - ha - naṃ ga - bhī -

21 **2** poco più mosso ♩ = 63c.

S. 1
pp
Na mṛt - yur ā - sīd, am - ṛ - taṃ na tar - hi. Na rā - tri - ā a - hna ā - sīt pra ke - taḥ. Ā - nīd a -

S. 2
pp
Na mṛt - yur ā - sīd, am - ṛ - taṃ na tar - hi. Na rā - tri - ā a - hna ā - sīt pra ke - taḥ. Ā - nīd a -

A. 1
pp
Na mṛt - yur ā - sīd, am - ṛ - taṃ na tar - hi. Na rā - tri - ā a - hna ā - sīt pra ke - taḥ. Ā - nīd a -

A. 2
pp
Na mṛt - yur ā - sīd, am - ṛ - taṃ na tar - hi. Na rā - tri - ā a - hna ā - sīt pra ke - taḥ. Ā - nīd a -

T. 1
ram ? (m)

B. 1
ram ? (m)

B. 2
ram ? (m)

27 **3**

S. 1
vā - taṃ svadha - yā tad e - kaṃ. Tas - mād dhān - yan na pa - raḥ kiṃ ca - nā - sa. Ta - ma ā - sīt

S. 2
vā - taṃ svadha - yā tad e - kaṃ. Tas - mād dhān - yan na pa - raḥ kiṃ ca - nā - sa. Ta - ma ā - sīt

A. 1
vā - taṃ svadha - yā tad e - kaṃ. Tas - mād dhān - yan na pa - raḥ kiṃ ca - nā - sa. Ta - ma ā - sīt

A. 2
vā - taṃ svadha - yā tad e - kaṃ. Tas - mād dhān - yan na pa - raḥ kiṃ ca - nā - sa. Ta - ma

32 *poco accel.*

S. 1 ta - ma - sā gud - ham a - gre; A - pra - ke - tam sa - li - lam sar - va - mā

S. 2 ta - ma - sā gud - ham a - gre; A - pra - ke - tam sa - li - lam sar - va - mā

A. 1 ta - ma - sā gud - ham a - gre; A - pra - ke - tam sa - li - lam sar - va - mā

A. 2 ā - sīt ta - ma - sā gud - ham a - gre; A - pra - ke - tam sa - li - lam sar - va - mā

T. 1 In a

T. 2 In a

B. 1 In

35 $\text{♩} = 72c.$

S. 1 i - dam. Tuch - ye - nā - bhū a - pi - hi - tam (m) yad ā - sīt ta - pa - sas tan.

S. 2 i - dam. Tuch - ye - nā - bhū a - pi - hi - tam (m) yad ā - sīt ta - pa - sas tan.

A. 1 i - dam. Tuch - ye - nā - bhū a - pi - hi - tam (m) yad ā - sīt ta - pa - sas tan.

A. 2 i - dam. Tuch - ye - nā - bhū a - pi - hi - tam (m) yad ā - sīt ta - pa - sas tan.

T. 1 world - less time - less light - less great

T. 2 world - less time - less light - less

B. 1 a world - less time - less light - less

B. 2 great emp -

I. THE DARK

Tempo I (♩ = 54c.)

Attacca subito

38 *poco cresc.*

S. 1 — mahi - nā - jā - ya - tai - kam - (m)

S. 2 *poco cresc.* — mahi - nā - jā - ya - tai - kam - (m)

A. 1 *poco cresc.* — mahi - nā - jā - ya - tai - kam - (m)

A. 2 *poco cresc.* — mahi - nā - jā - ya tai - kam - (m)

T. 1 *pp* — ti - ness *p* Four faced_ Brah - mā broods.

T. 2 — great emp - ti - ness *p* Four faced_ Brah - mā broods.

B. 1 — great emp - ti - ness *p* Four faced_ Brah - mā broods.

B. 2 — ti - ness *p* Four faced_ Brah - mā broods.

4 Allegro ♩ = 100c.

43 *f vib. ord.*

S. 1 Of a sudden a sea of joy sur -

S. 2 *f vib. ord.* Of a sudden a sea of joy *mf* sur - ges

A. 1 *f vib. ord.* Of a sudden a sea of joy *mf* sur - ges sur -

A. 2 *f vib. ord.* Of a sudden a sea of joy *mf* sur - ges sur -

T. 1 *f vib. ord.* a sea of joy *mf* sur ges

T. 2 *f vib. ord.* a sea of joy *mf* sur ges

B. 1 *f vib. ord.* a sea of joy *mf* sur ges sur ges

B. 2 *f vib. ord.* a sea of joy *mf* sur ges

