Out of the Froth of the Sea

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Out of the Froth of the Sea

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Music Theory, History, and Composition
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Master of Music

By
Rebekah Henry
May 2020

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I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Mark Rimple for his continued guidance throughout this project; he always had an open door or inbox and the incredible ability to help me realize a piece from my imagination.

I am also very grateful to Dr. Robert Maggio and Dr. Jacob Cooper for supporting the project in its final stages.

I cannot thank my amazing librettist Marlene Miller enough for her support, inspiration, and knack for knowing what words I sought even when I didn’t.

Even though the unprecedented circumstances surrounding this semester meant we were unable to perform *Out of the Froth of the Sea*, I am incredibly grateful to the musicians who were willing to learn this new work and provide feedback in the compositional process.

Finally, I must express my deep gratitude for my friends and family, who have been wonderfully supportive throughout this process and my education as a whole. This journey would not have been possible without you. Thank you.
Abstract

*Out of the Froth of the Sea* began in my imagination as a set of Psalm settings derived from excerpts using water imagery to describe our relationship to the Divine. As I began to think about the role of water in cultures around the world and in my daily life, however, other texts began to slip in and it quickly became an eclectic collection of texts ranging from mythologies to scientific treatises. Two things quickly became clear: this piece was not about a single religion or perspective, and I needed a wordsmith by my side. Marlene Miller stepped in to help me organize all my fragmented ideas into a coherent narrative and we worked together to fill the gaps with parcels of original text. The result is a blend of inspirations spanning from poetry and prose written by Marlene and me to the works of Roni Horn, Rumi, and Heraclitus, as well as Psalmody and Babylonian, Greek, Lithuanian, and Norse mythology.

To honor this diverse array of sources, I knew from the beginning that this piece would feel more like a collection of pieces than a single, homogenous work. Even so, there is large-scale symmetry in the way the movements are arranged: movements one and seven are motivically connected, as are movements three and five, while movements two and six feature the instrumentalists. Movement four is, in many ways, the heart of this piece; it contains the only texts from the Psalms which were the original inspiration for *Out of the Froth of the Sea*. The instrumentation also honors this diversity. I chose instruments from different families to allow myself to create varying textures. At the heart of *Out of the Froth of the Sea*, though, is the choir. As a secular cantata, this piece is designed to show off the diversity of the chamber choir, and using that medium to tell a story feels like a sacred experience to me.
From our earliest stories and songs, we have acknowledged water as the nourishment of life. It surrounds us in our oceans and atmosphere, and carries us to new adventures. This piece bookends physical descriptions of water and how we use it in our daily lives with the spiritual: water’s role in our myths and religions as a reflection of our humanity, our relationship to the divine, and our salvation. The libretto draws on a wide variety of sources, ranging from the ancient to the modern and crossing boundaries of religion and culture. Similarly, the music is inspired by a diverse array of styles from plainchant to modernism. Together, this patchwork of ideas creates a sense of diversity and, I hope, unity.

Although *Out of the Froth of the Sea* isn’t intended to be a cry for environmentalism. My hope is that audiences will leave the performance with an appreciation for the water around them - to stop and listen to the sounds of a creek or revel in the play of the light in a drinking glass - and that may certainly cause us to slow down and think about our role in caring for our planet.
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From the Librettist

*Out of the Froth of the Sea* examines the relationship between nearly all living things and their source of life: water. Water is a cosmic singularity, but for us it’s everywhere. When I think of mysticism and science, religion and tradition, life and death, I am drawn to the water. Standing by the water renders me silent; I could observe its endlessness forever. I imagine it’s the water in me calling out to the river, forever seeking to be joined together, forever flowing on. My hope is that this piece - its combination of poetry, prose, music, and technology - will render the listener as listless as the stream renders me. In all things, go smoothly.

-Marlene Miller
List of Electronic Cues

I. When I imagine the river, it’s something I can enter

   E1: Sampled narration, pads (2:03)

   E2: Running water, wind (0:42)

II. 994 kg/m³

   E3: Wind, noise, synthesized MSP sounds (0:59)

VII. Womb tears nourish salvation

   E4: Underwater gurgles, pads, strings (2:26)

   E5: Single breaking wave (0:04)
Instrumentation and Vocal Ranges

Instrumentation:

Soprano 1, 2
Alto 1, 2
Tenor 1, 2
Bass 1, 2
Flute, Piccolo, Alto Flute
Clarinet in Bb, Bass Clarinet in Bb
Cello
Piano
Prerecorded Stereo Electronics

Vocal Ranges:

S1
S2
A1
A2
T1
T2
B1
B2
I. When I imagine the river, it's something I can enter

E1 (start in m6 as shown): When I imagine the river, it's something I can enter, something that will surround me, take me away from here ... Right now, I'm looking at the Hudson River. It's so beautiful; this is one of my favorite places in the city for a variety of reasons, but I love the water. I grew up looking at the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina and there's something about looking at the Hudson River that is just, you know water is the same everywhere. So whenever you feel 'What's going on? Where am I?' That's a very grounding thing.
(after E2 has faded)

N: The water is before and after, inside and outside of us and all connected. Streams flow with breath into rivers of life into bays of energy into oceans of strength.

B2: Deep below us, water gathers under continents.

A2: All around us, water circles through the atmosphere.
II. 997 kg/m³

Allegretto $\frac{3}{4} = 84$

Nine hundred ninety seven kilograms per cubic meter.

Boils at two hundred and twelve degrees Fahrenheit.

Pizz. (very dry)
One hundred degrees Celsius

Fahrenheit.

Zero degrees Celsius

Melts at thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit.
After narration enters, all players remove a note or two of your choice each repeat.
(vamp continues under narration)

T1: Water can dissolve more substances than any other liquid, even deadly acids

N: But it cannot be destroyed itself.

T1: Zero calories or nutrients

A2: Transparent and tasteless

S2: Tasteless and colorless

B2: Colorless and odorless

B1: Odorless and transparent

(vamp stops)

S2: And you can never step in the same river twice.
III. Drinking gardening bathing

Singers should choose items to sing or speak aleatorically in ANY octave, staggering entrances. Text and music must be chosen from the SAME column - treble staves are to be sung and clefless staves spoken. Measures may be repeated if desired and performers should strive to move immediately from one to the next. Should last 3-5 minutes and create a large aural "wave" which becomes a little out of control before calming to a gurgle as narration enters. Tempo around 80 bpm.
Deep calls to deep.

A1: Our destruction and tsunami and icy tundra

S2: Our habitat and energy and salvation from the fire

(Singers begin to break off one at a time and repeat below as speech continues)

A2: Our thunder and rain and stormy gale

S1: Our stillness and peace and gentle waterfall

T1: Our genesis and annihilation

B1: Our snowfall and rainfall and fuel for growth

T2: Our bended knee and baptismal pool

B2: Our beginning, middle, and end

A1: Our prayer whispered up in futility

A2: Our answered blessings
IV. Deep calls to deep/the thunder of the sea

With space to breathe $\frac{1}{\text{c. 48}}$

Deep calls to deep/to out deep deep

Deep calls deep oh to deep deep

Deep deep deep oh deep deep

oh to deep
deepp to deep
deepp to deep.

Con moto

solo $\text{mp}$
deepp calls to deep deep

deepp to deep
deepp to deep.

S

A

T

B

ooh deep calls to deep to deep.
(silence)

waves
waves
kers

All your waves.

Your

Your

brea

swept

All

All

and

have

o-ver me.

o-ver me.

o-ver me.

o-ver me.

o-ver me.

o-ver me.

swept

swept

deep calls to deep oh my soul!

dead calls to deep oh my soul!

dead calls to deep oh my soul!

dead calls to deep oh my soul!

dead calls to deep oh my soul!
soul oh my soul! be be
my oh my soul! am am
oh oh my soul! neath neath
deep oh my soul! 1 1

be be to
am am calls
neath neath deep
1 1 Deep
N: The music of the stream is the song of the downhill, the song of the carving out of the earth, the song of sticks and pebbles and leaves being carried against their will to the sea - the song of constant babble and gurgle and of the slow, persistent endurance of change.
Moderato $\frac{\text{q} = 90-100}{\text{Moderato}}$

S 1

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

S 2

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

A 1

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

A 2

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

T 1

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

T 2

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

B 1

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

B 2

pp

\begin{align*}
\text{sea, sea, sea, sea, the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\text{the seas, } & \\
\end{align*}

Fl.
the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,

the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,

the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,

the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,

the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,

the seas, ooh have lifted up their voice,
have lifted up their pounding voice. Thunder, Thunder of, ooh

their pounding voice. The thunder of
accel.

of, Thunder of, Thunder of, Thunder of, Thunder

of, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder,

Thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder,

Thunder of, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder, The thunder,

the mighty waves, The thunder of the mighty waves, The thunder of the mighty waves, The thunder of

the mighty waves, The thunder of the mighty waves, The thunder of the mighty waves, The thunder of

f

f

f

f

f

f

f
of, The thunder of the mighty waves, The thunder of the mighty waves.
N: The same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg. Water is clear, odorless, and tasteless until it isn’t, but that doesn’t keep it from being water.
V. Well puddle mist tide
SSAATTBB

Singers should choose items to sing or speak and pair them as desired with measures below. Measures may be repeated as desired. Should last 2-4 minutes, with all beginning softly in unison and rising slowly to forte before stopping abruptly, creating the effect of a wave approaching and crashing. Tempo around 100 bpm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stagnate</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Puddle</th>
<th>Tub</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mist</td>
<td>Drip</td>
<td>Drop</td>
<td>Dribble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drizzle</td>
<td>Drink</td>
<td>Spit</td>
<td>Ebb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trickle</td>
<td>Babble</td>
<td>Drain</td>
<td>Spray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirt</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Erode</td>
<td>Spoud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spill</td>
<td>Leak</td>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creek</td>
<td>Wash</td>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pond</td>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>River</td>
<td>Current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foam</td>
<td>Irrigate</td>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lap</td>
<td>Pour</td>
<td>Pump</td>
<td>Ripple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll</td>
<td>Tide</td>
<td>Silt</td>
<td>Siphon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slosh</td>
<td>Sluice</td>
<td>Splash</td>
<td>Splatter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stir</td>
<td>Swill</td>
<td>Wash</td>
<td>Plunge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swamp</td>
<td>Spurt</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>Flush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour</td>
<td>Boil</td>
<td>Run</td>
<td>Drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move</td>
<td>Carry</td>
<td>Draw</td>
<td>Sparkle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distill</td>
<td>Tap</td>
<td>Filter</td>
<td>Save</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tread</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Divert</td>
<td>Conserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorb</td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Fill</td>
<td>Consume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Evaporate</td>
<td>Rise</td>
<td>Float</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Hold</td>
<td>Collect</td>
<td>Expand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blast</td>
<td>Damage</td>
<td>Cast</td>
<td>Gush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave</td>
<td>Cascade</td>
<td>Drench</td>
<td>Soak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engulf</td>
<td>Drown</td>
<td>Effuse</td>
<td>Deluge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spout</td>
<td>Torrent</td>
<td>Geyser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. The water is opaque

N: One cannot step into the same river twice.
As rivers flow, so does time.
Between the parting trees shines the noontime sun
On grass and dirt,
Insects and animals,
Birds, foxes, and mice.
Dew still fresh on leaves and petals,
Sit quietly next to a gentle stream.

(music begins)
And there by the stream lies a man
Alone in the depression he made in the grass
Gazing at his own reflection on the water.

Floating \( \frac{1}{2} = 72 \)

\[\text{bend down}\]

Vamp if necessary
B2: (cutting in) The water is opaque. It is comforting to imagine that once you are in it you won't be visible any longer and you won't see anything either.

(music begins)

N: Only sadness to men who pride beauty Above all else. Narcissus, weeping at the edge of the water, Became nothing but a flower. As the water sustained him in humanity Now too it sustains him in his new form. Ashes to ashes, Dust to dust, Beauty to beauty. Water is.
T1: Ashes to ashes
T2: Dust to dust
B1: Beauty to beauty
B2: Water is.
(pause)
S1: I won't talk about how water is a mirror, but it's hard to talk about water without talking about yourself.
VII. Womb tears nourish salvation

N: And out of the froth of the sea rose Aphrodite, goddess of all that is lovely and beautiful, carried to shore by Aphros and Bythos.

---

Adagio \( \text{q} = 40 \) (Lunga)

Pedal down throughout
N: Freya cries tears of red gold for her loss, but we cry tears of water, tears of life itself.

N: Glaucus was so talented as a fisherman that the gods deemed him worthy of becoming one of them, letting him dwell in the cool of the sea forever to bless his people.
N: Water says, "Come here," to the dirty.
N: Water says, "Drink deep," to the thirsty.
Water says, "Lay still," to the child learning to float.
drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __

drink deep, lay still, drink deep, lay still, __
lay still, drink deep,
laid still, drink deep,
laid still, drink deep,
laid still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
lay still, drink deep,
B2: (after a moment): Water says, “I am like you: dark and light and deep, beauty and destruction, defined and evading definition.”

N: But the water existed before us and will last beyond us.

(music begins again at m. 23)

A1: When you see your reflection in the water do you recognize the water in you?

As before $\frac{3}{4}$ = 40
N: The thirst in our souls is the magnetism of the water.

(E5: a single breaking wave)