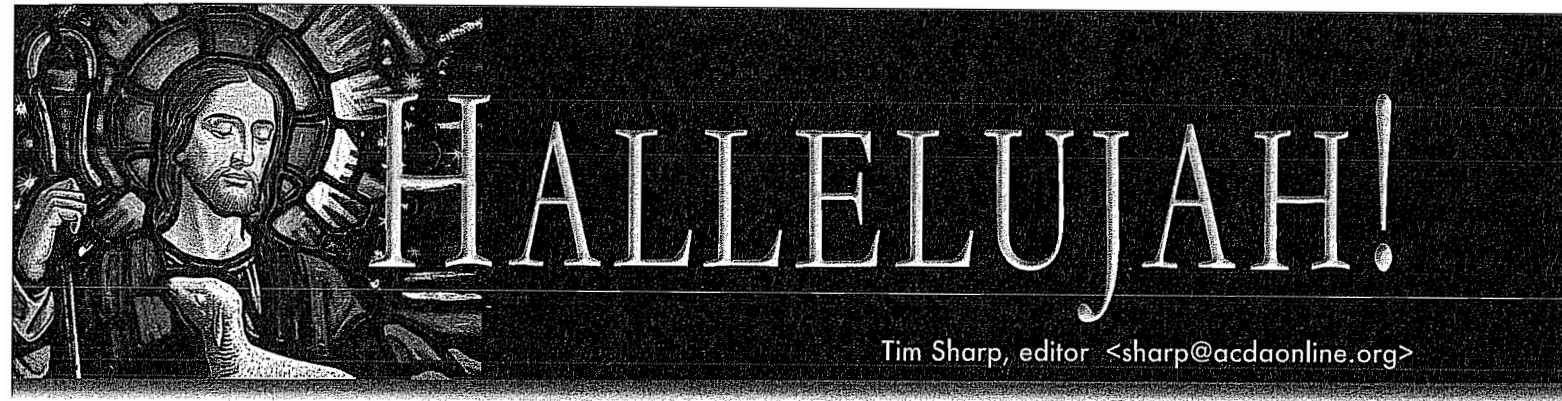




Tim Sharp, editor <sharp@acdaonline.org>

René Clausen's *Crying for a Dream*

by

Paul A. Aitken

Editorial Note: One of René Clausen's first choral commissions by an ACDA division was *Crying for a Dream*, a composition that deals with the issue of global warming forthrightly and from the spiritual standpoint of Native American culture. This column focuses on this composer and composition and discusses it on an analytical level with the hope that the work might be programmed to increase environmental awareness.

René King Clausen (b. 1953) is a notable American composer and conductor whose ongoing celebrated career has spanned three decades and whose musical accomplishments are significant enough to demand critical study. Clausen, a graduate of both St. Olaf College and the University

of Illinois, has an impressive and extensive list of professional accomplishments. As the first Paul J. and Eleanor Christiansen Chair in Choral Music at Concordia College in Moorehead, Minnesota, Clausen, in conjunction with his choral direction of the Concordia Singers, has continued to develop an ever-expanding discography.

Clausen was first introduced to music as a young boy. His father was organist at his hometown church, where René often played and improvised on one of the church's pianos while his father prepared for worship. As a teenager excelling at numerous instruments, he played in and wrote some arrangements for the high school band. As he grew and matured into a young man, his ever-expanding musical appetite paralleled his physical and mental development. However, it was at St. Olaf College, under the exceptional tutelage of Kenneth Jennings, where he fell in love with the choral art.² Moreover, it was during a college conducting class when a representative from the Mark Foster Music Company heard one of his earliest compositions, an event that subsequently led to a lengthy publishing relationship and a professional bond that has lasted thirty years.

Clausen's compositional style is varied and eclectic, ranging from works appropri-

ate for advanced high school and church choirs to more technically demanding compositions for college and professional choirs.³ His numerous professional accolades have placed Clausen in the forefront of the choral compositional scene, as reflected by the many commissions he has received. Although commissions had taken place previously, his first major one came in 1994, when the North Central Regional American Choral Directors Association requested an extended work based on Native-American themes.⁴ The resulting composition was titled *Crying for a Dream*, a challenging three-movement work for multiple choirs, flute, and two pianos. Other notable major commissions include "Canticle of Praise [which was] written for The Mormon Tabernacle Choir and The Kings Singers,"⁵ and *Memorial*, a piece commemorating the tragedies of September 11 and which was performed at the ACDA National Convention in New York City.⁶ The latter work was commissioned as part of ACDA's Raymond W. Brock Endowment Trust Commissioned Choral Composition Series.

Crying for a Dream

The 431 measure-long *Crying for a Dream* is one of his landmark composi-

Paul A. Aitken, the first winner of ACDA's Raymond W. Brock Memorial Student Composition Competition award (1999) for *Flanders Fields*, has continued his work as both composer and conductor at the Cathedral of the Rockies in Boise, Idaho, and as National R&S Chair of Music in Worship.



HALLELUJAH!

tions. Published in 1998 by Fostco Music Press, the three-movement work is scored for a large choral complement comprised of three SATB choirs, a children's choir, flute, two pianos, and narrator. Clausen also calls for the use of triangle in the composition's second movement, and for a rainstick and an ocean drum in the third movement. The text from which Clausen extracts musical inspiration comes from Native-American antiquity, movements I and II being drawn from "Teton Sioux Music" by Frances Densmore (Bulletin 61 of Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1918).⁷ The titles

of these Sioux songs include *Song of the Final Visit to the Vapor Lodge*, *Wakan'tanka Hears Me*, *Lakota Pipe Song*, *At the Wind Center I Stand*, *A Wolf I Considered Myself*, *The Earth Only Endures*, *Even the Eagle Dies*, and *Song of the Sitting Bull*.⁸ Chief Seattle (1790–1866) wrote the text for the third movement, titled, *How Can You Buy the Sky?*⁹

Crying for a Dream was composed for the 1994 ACDA North Central Division Convention in Rapid City, South Dakota, and was premiered on March 5, 1994, by the following ensembles and directors: "The Des Moines Children's Choir (Eugene Wilson, director), the Clarion Chamber Choir (Stanley Schmidt, director), Grinnell Concert Choir (John Stuhr Rommerheim, director), and the Valley Singers (Ray Salucka, director)."¹⁰ *Crying for a Dream* is recorded by the Concordia Choir on its CD titled *The Choral Music of René Clausen, Volume I*.

the creation of the movement. In fact, at measure twenty-nine, it becomes apparent that all the previous musical and motivic material was simply an antecedent introduction to the consequent material following measure twenty-nine. Clausen uses the "I will live" fragments from the introduction within the "Wakan'tanka" texture to develop continuity throughout the piece. In the next major sections of the movement, Clausen creates and develops two new melodic/motivic ideas based upon *Wakan'tanka*, *Friend of the Eagle*, and *A-ja-ja* in much the same manner as took place in the introduction. Clausen brings all five of these motivic ideas together in the Coda as a means of bringing a deep sense of unity from one area of the piece to the next. This heightened sense of motivic development and co-integration has not been nearly as pronounced in his other works.

The final measures of this first movement are also fascinating; there is no final cadence of any traditional nature. From the point at which the key changes to A major at measure ninety-five, there are very few other chords present in the mixture. The listener experiences a subdominant to tonic relationship at measures 109–10, but there is little impression that this is a cadence. The final fifteen measures are simply an extension of the tonic chord. Furthermore, in comparable fashion to measures fifty-two to sixty-two, this tonic chord is again devoid of the third, replaced instead with the second scale degree of B[♮].

War Song

Clausen draws from the remaining Sioux Songs for the second movement. It is quickly apparent that Clausen's choice of chords was a very deliberate attempt to tie this second movement to the end of the first movement. In the previous movement, the final chord was an extended A

Hear Me, I Will Live!

The text for the first movement of *Crying for a Dream* is drawn from the first three *Sioux Songs* mentioned above. Interestingly, Clausen's recording of this composition differs from the score. In the original score, only one flute presents the opening idea. In the recorded version conducted by Clausen, two flutes provide additional measures of music before the entrance of the piano. The amended version creates the aural sensation of being surrounded by nature and having two birds calling out for one another.

It is quickly apparent that each of the movements is skillfully crafted as Clausen creates motivic material that acts as binding matter throughout each movement, a technique also used in other Clausen compositions but raised to new levels in this more complex work. The "a voice" and "I will live" fragments are worth noting as important motivic ideas crucial to

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Music • Community Music School Children's Choir Director

The MSU College of Music and Community Music School seek an enthusiastic Children's Choir Director to direct and grow their acclaimed Children's Choir Program full time during the academic year.

Job Summary: Responsible for oversight of the choral ensembles of the MSU Community Music School. In consultation with the Executive Director of the Community Music School, the Director sets the overall vision for the program, including artistic and administrative initiatives. In addition to conducting two of the three choirs, the Director oversees the director of the third choir and engages in recruitment, promotion, and outreach.

Qualifications: Bachelor's in music or equivalent with a preference for master's in music or the equivalent. Background in music education is desirable. Basic piano/keyboard skills are desirable. Organizational and supervisory skills required. Experience in developing and sustaining choral ensembles. Must demonstrate advanced conducting skills and choral rehearsal techniques.

For more information, or to apply for this position, visit: www.jobs.msu.edu or visit our offices at 1407 S. Harrison, Room 110, East Lansing, MI.

MSU is committed to achieving excellence through cultural diversity. The University actively encourages applications and/or nominations of women, persons of color, veterans and persons with disabilities.

chord based upon the root, the second, and the fifth. The third of the chord is conspicuously absent. In this contrasting second movement, Clausen again uses root, second, and fifth; however, a new tonal center is in place—the key of C. Since there is some intentional ambiguity about the key of the movement, Clausen takes his time establishing the key of C. He reveals his intention in measure eight when numerous sharps indicate the use of a rarely utilized whole tone scale centered around C. This whole-tone key center is specifically chosen to pictorially develop the text "At the center of the Earth I stand" by depicting the idea of being "centered" by not only being devoid of semitones but also by evolving from middle C, that is, the traditional "center" of a standard piano keyboard.

At measure 112, the flute, which has been silent for the entirety of this movement, enters and begins a flute cadenza/soliloquy. The flute part, an extension of the previous D-minor idea, is quite musically descriptive and is a positive contribution to the score, as it provides a needed break after the tension of the "Soldier, you fled" dialogue. The flute soliloquy ends as quickly as it began, not to return until the third movement. This cadenza material is very much reminiscent of Clausen's horn cadenza in *Communion*.

How Can You Buy the Sky?

Regardless of the length of this final movement, "How Can You Buy the Sky?" is formally the simplest to understand. Clausen takes a large quantity of text and sets it for all the musical forces listed above, without the triangle. The last movement can be thematically divided into two parts: the first 115 measures and a closing hymn.

In stark contrast to the opening movement, this entire opening section is monothematic: "How can you buy the

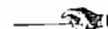
sky? How can you sell the wind and rain?" is virtually all that the choir sings. Clausen also makes use of only two different keys in this lengthy section, F major and G major. As is the case in all of Clausen's work, the most important factor is accentuating the text. The narration is almost sermon-like, is punctuated by the return of the children's choir, and contains an ancient and poignant environmental message. The tune differs from the opening material and is stated in an almost hymn-like way: "Brother Eagle, Sister Sky, give your children wings to fly. Soar above our Mother Earth. Keep her safe, who keeps us birth." Steadfast in the key of G major, this profound message continues with the entrance of the entire choir unaccompanied: "Hold us ever in your mind, To each other help us bind. Teach us, help us, let us see how to dwell in unity. Brother Eagle, Sister Sky, give your children wings to fly. Gently as a morning dove, move our hearts to dwell in love."

In the first movement, Clausen opened in the key of G Lydian. In a very analogous way, he closes the third movement with G Lydian. In a sense, Clausen takes the Biblical idea of "from dust we are raised and to dust we shall return" and infers this musically. He does so with a musical question. The final chord could have been a restful G-major chord. In the case of *Crying for a Dream*, he closes this major work on the dominant harmony. In an analogous way, Clausen is spiritually referring to the inflection of the question: "How Can You Buy the Sky?" and referring to the idea of an afterlife—an afterlife to which he is subtly stating that we may all someday return to the Sky.

NOTES

- ¹ JWPepper.com: World's Largest Sheet Music Retailer [database on-line] (Paoli, Pennsylvania: J.W. Pepper & Son, Inc., 2004, first accessed 6 June 2004), <<http://www.jwpepper.com>>.

- ² Guy, Todd W., "The Compositional Process of René Clausen as Demonstrated in Selected Choral Works," (D.M.A. Dissertation, Ball State University, 1998), 176–181.
- ³ René Clausen Biography, Published Arrangements & Compositions, and René Clausen Choral School Information [database on-line] (Moorhead, MN., René Clausen Music Company, 1997–2004, first accessed 5 February 2004), <<http://www.reneclausen.com/bioninfo/biography.html>>.
- ⁴ Concordia College Faculty Biography [database on-line] (Moorhead, MN., Concordia College, 1996–2004, first accessed 5 February 2004), <<http://www.cord.edu/dept/music/faculty/clausenrene.html>>.
- ⁵ (Concordia College Faculty Biography <http://www.cord.edu/dept/music/faculty/clausenrene.html>).
- ⁶ Concordia College: News Release: Clausen Commissioned To Write 9-11 Commemorative Music, (Moorhead, MN., Concordia College Office of Communications, September 4, 2002, first accessed 12 March 2004), <<http://www.concordiacollege.edu/dept/news/releases/02182.html>>.
- ⁷ René Clausen, *Crying for a Dream*. (Delaware Water Gap, PA: Fostco Music Press, 1998), preface.
- ⁸ Clausen, *Crying for a Dream*, preface.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Clausen, *Crying for a Dream*, 1.



Gladde Music Publications
The Choral Music of Bradley Nelson

"Witty....whimsical....jazzy!"

"SPRING RAIN"

www.GladdeMusic.com

~ See the score....hear a recording ~