

# Program Notes

by Eric Bromberger

## a loose affiliation of alleluias

concerto for violin and three voices

### CELESTE ORAM

Born 1990, Manhattan



*The composer has supplied a program note for this work:*

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in order of appearance)

#### THREE TEEN ANGELS

or Sibyls. (less likely, though possible: sirens/muses/valley girls.)

or the d'Aranyi sisters.

or a popstar supergroup of Cassandra, Joan of Arc, and Greta Thunberg.

#### THE PRIEST

a specialist in musical divination.

#### TWO DIMENSIONS OF A PENDULUM'S SWING

#### INCENSE

the smell of light filtered through layers of past and presence.

#### THREE CHOIRS

aligned not by being in the same time, but in the same place.

#### AN AILING BAT

disoriented in the rafters.

#### THE ARCHITECTURE, and/or, THE LUNGS

cobwebs of resonance. mechanisms of ventilation & convection.

#### SPIRIT

*I will press your hand now and there it is—life—  
it comes in waves,*

*it will disappear, it has not disappeared,  
accept destruction, accept*

[...]

*The canary singing in your mind is in mine.*

— Jorie Graham, *fast* (2017)

If there are affiliations between this violin concerto and Robert Schumann's, perhaps the closest is with respect to the second movement of the latter, whose theme also appears in Schumann's Ghost Variations WoO 24, and was dictated to Schumann by a choir of angels. Perhaps this concerto's pop song structure (into, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus, outro, fade) also pays tribute to a composer who, even when tasked with writing a violin concerto, couldn't help but (do what he did best and) write a song.

This piece is an invitation to listen to and through familiar strains accumulated into a disorienting density.

#### CREDITS

Some of the generative musical material comes from:

- the song "redemption" by serpentwithfeet (2016)
- the song "Boy in the Bubble" by Paul Simon (1986)
- an anonymous 2-voice hymn from the Codex Calixtinus, a 12thC pilgrim's guide to the Camino di Santiago;
- three excerpts from Giovanni Gabrieli's "Exaudi me Domine" (1615) (figurations setting the words "quando caeli", "movendi sunt", & "et terra")

In many foundational ways, this piece has been informed and emboldened by Cassandra Miller's "Duo for Cello & Orchestra", written for Charles Curtis, and by the singularity of these two artists. Other sine-qua-nons: Carolyn Chen, Bobbi Jene Smith, Lauren Jones, Barbara Byers, Steven Schick, Keir GoGwilt.

#### PERFORMANCE NOTES

##### STAGE SET-UP

The percussionists are placed in stereo, i.e. one stage left, and one stage right.

Because of the recurring independent tempi, it is recommended that the winds are grouped into three quartets which sit together:

1. piccolo, Eb clarinet, oboe, trumpet 1
2. alto flute, cor anglais, horn 1, bassoon
3. trumpet 2, horn 2, bass clarinet, contrabassoon

There is a second violin soloist from the Violin I section who is positioned in the wings (offstage right) for the entire piece. Ideally it is a player who would have been seated in the row of Violin Is closest to the front of the stage, so that their empty chair onstage is maximally conspicuous. This soloist should not, however, be the concertmaster or assistant concertmaster. Toward the end of the piece, the offstage violin soloist is required to walk out of the wings (towards backstage) and progressively further from the stage, in order to engineer a spatial decrescendo by moving further and further from the audience. As a result, the soloist should be someone able and prepared to (a) play without music, i.e. improvise from a given collection of gestural material, and (b) walk while playing. (Weather & feasibility permitting, the player might actually leave the building and walk around the outside of Mandeville, so as to be heard on the other side of the emergency exit doors.)

There is a glass of drinkable water (half-full) on the conductor's podium, within reach of the violin soloist.

It is recommended that the Teen Angels are in the wings offstage left to allow for sightlines with the conductor, though other arrangements are possible.

It is recommended that both the onstage violin soloist and the Teen Angels are amplified. The violin soloist can be amplified through the main house PA, but the Angels should be amplified via a more localised speaker array,

either in the offstage wing where the vocalists are positioned, or above the stage.

#### GENERAL NOTATION

The solo violin part is largely improvised. At times, a harmonic foundation is given for the soloist's improvisations. Other times, the soloist is guided by concise instructions, or responds freely to the orchestral/vocal parts.

Material inside boxes is to be played at a tempo independent of the conductor's. Boxed material should start precisely where the box begins relative to the conductor's tempo, but then proceeds in its own time (i.e. boxed material might in practice finish sooner or later than where it ends in the printed score relative to the main tempo material). Where a metronome marking is given inside a box, the boxed passage is played with at least one other instrumental part: those with the same tempo marking must therefore keep time together. Where no metronome marking is given, a player can choose a tempo freely.

The whispered vocal "shhh", wherever it appears, should sound resonant, and insistent but gentle: less like the discipline of a harried schoolteacher, and more like the tender consolation offered to a distraught sleepless child.

#### STRINGS

All violinists, violists, and cellists require practice mutes.

Each double bass player requires a bass drum beater (TG4 or similar).

When the strings divide into (a) and (b), it is recommended that each player at a single desk plays a different divisi each (rather than dividing by desks). At times, each string section is divided into four parts—(a) into two pitches, and (b) into two pitches—and this will require a different arrangement. It is recommended that certain desks are assigned to either the top or bottom note: for example, at one desk, one player will play the bottom note of (a) and the other player the bottom note of (b); at another desk, one player will play the top note of (a) and the other player the top note of (b). ■