

About the Music & Composers

Henry Brant, *Wind, Water, Clouds & Fire*

Wind, Water, Clouds & Fire was commissioned for Present Music for performances on November 19 and 21, 2004 at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Milwaukee. It may be described as an extraplanetary, environmental oratorio. Following is a description of the vocal and instrumental forces involved:

3 women's choruses, each with its own conductor, each singing music independent of the other choruses.

1 children's chorus, with its own conductor, singing music independent of the other choruses.

All choruses are widely separated and sing text adapted from notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.

To each women's chorus is assigned the text of one of Leonardo's philosophic-scientific reflections, as follows: Chorus I—Wind, Chorus II—Water, Chorus III—Clouds. The text of Leonardo's observations and analyses of the properties of Fire is given to the children's chorus (Chorus IV).

Women's choruses I and II are located, respectively, midway in the two side aisles, facing into the audience; the third women's chorus sings from the gallery. The children's chorus is positioned in the apse.

A solo wind player is stationed with each choral group and takes the role of obbligato commentator: oboe and soprano saxophone, each with an aisle women's chorus, flute with women's chorus III in the gallery. And two unison clarinets will stand in the middle of the children's voices in the apse.

Situated downstairs behind the congregational area, is a unison group of violins led by its own conductor. Each choral conductor maintains accurate rhythmic coordination within his/her group, the violin conductor likewise, but the groups make no effort to stay together. All entrances and exits are signaled to the group conductors by the principal conductor, Kevin Stalheim, from a platform in the apse. Placed around Kevin in the apse are two separated instrumental groups:

Two percussionists (playing chimes, glockenspiel, xylophone, cowbells, wood blocks, steel drums)

Two keyboard players (pianos, harpsichord)—plus harp

The organ has a complex improvised part played in the gallery.

Six trumpets complete the instrumentation. Four of them are located in the four corners of the congregation area and play facing in toward the audience. A jazz trumpeter plays riff and blues from the apse, and a piccolo trumpet intones obbligati in alternation with the children's chorus's Gregorian-like chanting.

Generally speaking, the action of *Wind, Water, Clouds and Fire* is concerned with a contemplation of the workings of the natural world, and of the extent to which the increasing complexity of human affairs may conflict with basic planetary processes. With the aim of suggesting distances far beyond the planet Earth, the entire musical texture of this work is expressed in pitches above middle C.

Lyrics

Chorus I

When many ocean winds collide waves have no space to travel but crash and sometimes sink ships.

Strongest winds then will win by being less tangled up with the other winds.

With winds of great force that one with greater spatial volume will exceed all the other in strength.

All winds that attack the earth come down from above making violent rebounding motions which incessantly are grazing the earth.

Wind is much more forceful high up.

Wind has much less power low down.

When the wind starts with fury it will only last a short time.

Wind which has a more furious origin will also have a shorter duration.

Wind itself is invisible. Only various objects and substances carried by the wind are visible in the air.

Wind is very dense on mountain tops and in valleys when the mountains which enclose them are very high.

Wind Spaces. Wind Spaces. Wind Spaces. Wind Spaces.

When 2 clouds met driven by the same wind the larger one covers the smaller taking over some of the wind's

power.

The 2 clouds then combine that way producing rain.

Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci.

Chorus II

Water moves in the same ways as the wind.

Water wears away the tops of the mountains.

Water drives the sea away from the old shores and the sea has gone back to the sea many times.

Movement of water inside water that is much like movement of air inside air.

Water is sometimes acid, sometimes bitter. Water is sometimes thick, sometimes thin. Without stopping, water is always consuming and capturing whatever it touches.

Wet wind found in caverns that have both exit and entrance can produce water.

Water is what keeps this dry planet alive and without it nothing among us can survive.

Water Spaces. Water Spaces. Water Spaces. Water Spaces.

Water rages turbulently with furious violence at others it is clear, peaceful and playful. Water helps keep this dry planet alive.

Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci.

Chorus III

Clouds often descend to earth and are instantly cut right off becoming invisible when the air is still and a large group of clouds has risen to a high level and then these clouds are pressed close together. They squeeze out so much air that you can see this compression transferred to other smaller clouds.

When 2 contrary winds force 2 clouds to collide both clouds merge and being unable to descend because of the wind moving under them they are forced to extend upwards.

To create a cloud a great quantity of air needs to rush together. When a cloud is created it also generates wind and then it dissolves and changes into air increasing its size and shape.

Clouds are formed with different round shapes which are separated in different spaces.

Concentration of humidity scattered throughout the air cause formations of clouds and changes both their actual size and their shape.

Clouds Spaces. Clouds Spaces. Clouds Spaces. Clouds Spaces.

The more furious the wind is when it starts the shorter will be its duration. Wind is itself invisible. Only those things carried by the wind can be seen.

Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci.

Chorus IV

Fire begins and ends in smoke.

No animal that breathes can live in a place where fire can't burn.

Medium wind makes a fire bigger. Too much wind puts it out.

Smoke in which fire begins is much hotter than smoke in which it ends.

If more and more wood is piled up, your fire will get bigger and bigger.

Young dry wood will make a much brighter blue smoke than old damp wood.

If you put your candle in a cold place the light will get dim.

Fire gets bigger and bigger if fuel keeps piling on.

Smoke is fast when it starts and slow as it rises because rising makes it colder and heavier.

Fire begins at the top of a round blue flame then stretches and becomes a heart pointing up to the sky.

Fire Spaces. Fire Spaces. Fire Spaces. Fire Spaces.

No animal can live where fire cannot burn.

Fire begins and ends in smoke.

Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci, Vinci, Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci.

Henry Brant Biography

Henry Brant is America's foremost composer of acoustic spatial music. The planned positioning of performers

throughout the hall, as well as on stage, is an essential factor in his composing scheme and a point of departure for a radically expanded range and intensity of musical expression. Brant's mastery of spatial composing technique enables him to write textures of unprecedented polyphonic and/or polystylistic complexity while providing maximum resonance in the hall and increased clarity of musical detail for the listener. His catalogue now comprises over 100 spatial works.

Born in Montreal of American parents in 1913, Brant began composing at the age of eight. After moving to New York in 1929, he composed and conducted for radio, film, ballet, and jazz groups. Starting in the late 40s, he taught at Columbia University, Julliard and, for 24 years, Bennington College.