

Andrew Lovett

Lonely Sits the City

libretto

2009

## **Lonely Sits The City (2009)**

for solo soprano and electronics

Duration: 30 minutes.

Commissioned by Frances M Lynch with funds provided by The Britten-Pears Foundation, The European Association for Jewish Culture and The Arts Council of England (GftA).

The first performance took place on May 19, 2009, at the Junction Theatre, Cambridge with Frances M Lynch (soprano) and Alan Burgess (sound). The production, by The Electric Voice Theatre, was supported (additionally) by The Holst Foundation, The Junction Theatre and The Centre for Music and Science at the University of Cambridge.

The text is based on the *Book of Lamentations* from the Hebrew Bible. This sequence of five poems follows an ancient tradition of mourning literature after the fall of a city; in this case, the city of Jerusalem, conquered and destroyed in 586BC.

The first four poems are acrostic (each line begins with successive letters of the hebrew alphabet). In the middle of the first poem, the narrative switches from a third-person description of the desolate city to a first-person voice ("May if not befall you all who pass by this road"). This voice is (grammatically) female, representing the city itself. The thoughts and feelings reflected in this text are so graphic and immediate that they suggest a real woman who has undergone a terrifying - traumatic - experience and now surveys the destruction around her. Giving sense and shape to this woman's emotional experience is the main purpose of this piece. At the end of section 4, there is a clear moment where she must summon the strength and courage to continue.

Ideally, the piece is performed in a space with an array of loudspeakers: two (or four) main monitors for the electronic music, four separate surround speakers for the female chorus and one high speaker, above the audience, for the Prophet.

Cast:

on-stage (live):

The woman - soprano

off-stage (pre-recorded):

- female chorus (four sopranos)
- the Prophet - countertenor. Projected from above the space
- the man - baritone (section 3 only)

The electronic music uses samples from: percussion (Tim Palmer); cello (Judith Mitchell); the Golden Lyre of Ur (Andy Lowings), spoken and whispered text (Judith Levi).

Recorded voices: Frances Lynch (soprano) and David Sheppard (countertenor and baritone).

**Libretto:**

**I: May it not befall you**

*In darkness. The woman (soloist) is off-stage or barely visible.*

Woman: Echah. *Alas.*

Female chorus: Echah. *Alas.*

The Prophet: Alef, bet. Echah. *A. B. Alas.*

Yashvah badad ha-ir  
rabati am... *Lonely sits the city  
once great with people...*

*Lights gradually come up to reveal a scene of devastation and destruction.*

Female chorus: Echah.  
Yashvah badad ha-ir  
rabati am. *Lonely sits the city  
once great with people...*

Female chorus  
and Prophet: Bachoh, tivkeh  
balailah. *Bitterly she weeps  
in the night...*

*Slowly, painfully, the woman enters the space.  
She addresses the audience directly:*

The woman: May it not befall you,  
all who pass by this road.  
Behold and See,  
if there is any pain  
like my pain,  
which befell me.

Fire in my bones.  
Crushed. Desolate.  
Over these things I weep.  
And my heart is sick.

## II: Burnt. Fire. Razed.

*Lighting change. The woman reacts to the sounds around her.*

Woman: Echah!  
Alef. Bet. Gimel. Dalet. Hei. vav etc (A. B. C. D. E....etc)

The Prophet: Gimel. Dalet. Hei, Vav (etc) (D.E.F.G.. etc)

Woman: Echah. Echah!

Woman: Burnt. Fire. Razed. Consumed.  
Destroyed. Devoured.  
Echah!

Female chorus: Echah! Burnt. Fire. Razed.

Woman: Echah!

Female chorus: Echah!

Woman: Houses burnt.  
Gates sunken.  
Bars shattered.

The Prophet: Echah.  
Yaiv, be-apo Adonai  
et bat Zion,  
Ishlich mishamiyim  
eretz tiferet Yisrael. *In his wrath, the Lord shamed  
the daughters of Zion.  
cast down from heaven  
the majesty of Israel.*

Woman: No vision. No guidance.

The Prophet: V'lo zacker hadom,  
raglav beyom apo *He did not remember his  
temple on his day of wrath.*

Woman: They sit on the ground in silence.  
Ashes and sackcloth.  
Heads bowed to the ground,  
like a dying man in the streets of the town.

O daughters of Jerusalem!  
O daughters of Zion!

And your enemies:

They clap. They hiss.  
They jeer and gnash.  
They rejoice.

Arise! Arise!  
Pour out your hearts.  
Arise! Pour out your hearts!

On the ground.  
In the streets.  
Young and Old.  
Fallen by the sword.  
Slaughtered without mercy.  
Wiped out.

Arise! Arise!  
Pour out your heart!  
Arise! Arise!  
Pour out your Heart!  
Echah!

*The woman collapses.*

### **III: I am the man driven into darkness**

*Very dark. Sounds of extreme pain and anguish.*

Prophet:                    Lamed. Mem, Nun. Samekh... (etc)                    *L. M. N.... (etc)*

The Man:  
*(off-stage)*                    I am the man driven into darkness.  
My flesh flailed. My bones broken.  
In darkness like the eternally dead.  
imprisoned, chained -  
though I cry out and plead.  
Remember my afflictions and my sorrow.  
I call out from the depths.  
Do not shut your ear when I cry out.

### **IV: My children Thirst**

*The woman recovers and reacts (to section 3).*

Woman (gasps):                    (Ch)ah!  
Alef .Bet. Gimel (etc)                    *A. B.C (etc)*  
Echah.

My children thirst, beg for food.  
Skin shrivelled on their bones.  
Famine is worse than the sword.  
Our eyes strained for deliverance.  
Echah.

## **V: Remember**

Prophet:	Alef. Bet. Gimel... (etc)	<i>A. B. C. (etc)</i>
Female chorus:	Zechor Adonai mehayah lanu Habeyt oorey et hepatenu.	<i>Remember, Lord what has befallen us behold and see our disgrace.</i>
Woman:	Echah. Remember. Remember.  Look and see. Scorched. Ravaged. Gone is the joy of our hearts. Our dancing has turned to mourning. Remember.	
Female chorus:	Zechor	<i>Remember.</i>
Woman:	Remember. Echah.	
Female chorus: (and Prophet)	Hadesh yamenu kechedem.	<i>Renew our days as of old.</i>
Woman:	Alef. Bet. Gimel. Dalet. Hey... (etc)  Remember. Remember.	<i>A. B. C. D.... (etc)</i>
Female chorus:	Hadesh yamenu kechedem.	<i>Renew our days as of old.</i>
Woman	Remember. Remember. Remember...	

*Lights fade to darkness.*