

Time Pieces

The title of this set of four, "Time Pieces," has a double meaning. First, it is a work that was occasioned by the passage of time: it was composed as the project marking the completion of my eighth year at Dordt College, as is required of all who teach at Dordt. More importantly, each movement deals in some way with an aspect of God's time: Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and the New Creation.

In the first movement, "Sky Dance," Dave Schelhaas' poem shows how God's creative work is seen in the magnificent "dance" of starlings. Musically, I've tried to capture both the graceful elegance of their flight, as well as the "gargling raucous" sound of their chatter.

In "The Coiled Spring," Luke Schelhaas' poem uses a rustic scene of four seasons to illustrate how, while "the Fall is threaded through us," we sense the time in God's plan when there will be "no fall's reprise." The Latin insertions, not a part of the original poem, are intended to frame the movement, and, being set in musical styles quite different from that of the main body of the text, indicate that this cycle has been the experience of countless generations of believers: the main text is set as simple chant for the men, and as something akin to "English discant" (harmonized chant) for the women; the Kyries have a contemporary sound; and the Agnus Deis employ a harmony in keeping with that of 19th-century Romanticism.

The cello solo introducing the third movement, "We Know Him," calls back melodic ideas from the first movement, but now disguised by a slower tempo; before the violin and piano enter with a celebrative dance, a hint of "O Come, O Come, Immanuel" can be heard. The main melodic idea of this movement is an expansion upon the opening of "Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People"—the mournful longing of the introduction answered by the proclamation of Christ's arrival.

The final movement, "Give Us Love," is a prayerful hymn by Mike Vanden Bosch, and speaks both of praise and of longing for the consummation of God's redemptive work. The cello and violin return to thematic material heard before, now in an almost static manner, portraying a motionless sense of peace and rest. — B.K.

Time Pieces

BENJAMIN KORNELIS (2002)

I. Sky Dance

A wave of starlings lifts from wire and tree,
Pulls left, turns up and banks into the breeze
Then back again it furls haphazardly,
Swoops down, alights, comes up once more
To soar around a grove and disappear.
As if a boy with magnet, randomly
Some iron filings teased across a page of pale blue sky.

At night, like Jekyll, they're transformed.
They roost in trees near houses in the town.
A hundred creatures on a single bough
Fuss, fidget, gossip, sleep and foul the ground.
At dawn a gargling raucous morning chorus sounds.

Then suddenly a silence comes as if some grand
Conductor with invisible baton tapped twice upon his stand.
The new day's flight begins, a visual symphony for sky:
Crescendiminuendos rise and fall against the eye
While melodies of shape move contrapuntally
Weaving a staff of eighth and sixteenth notes above the trees.

Too random to be patterned, too graceful to be free,
What is it guides this sky dance each fall day?
Did he who marks the sparrows fall with care
Design this choreography for birds in air? — *David Schelhaas*

II. The Coiled Spring

*Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.
Dona nobis pacem.*

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.
Grant us peace.

Winter wheat lies green and grassy, grows;
slow life in frozen air and earth still rallies.
The snow has melted back to half-black patches between rows,
is found now only down from hills: in valleys.
But even that is scant and patches few—the story goes
that when one looks he sees not snow but snows.

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

*Spring will first wash muddy, then will clean.
A warmer sun on worlds hurled out of stasis
will soon shine and, shining, quicken this sloth scene.
But in cleaning and in quickening, Spring will not have spent her graces:
growing is result of graces raining, inserene,
graces running, gathering, rising gold then green.*

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Summer's hay, like sunshine bound in bales,
looks back on dryer days and darker soil.
Some brown cows stumble 'round these sunny bundles, swishing tails;
they know not that the sun, though bound, is winter's certain foil.
Content to plod, not apt to ponder, heeding distant hails,
the cows move hardly homeward, slowly, down dirt trails.

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.

*Fall is far removed from us according to our eyes;
our senses tell us that this failing winter fast will flag.
But in a world which, having fallen, seeks to rise,
the Fall is threaded through us. But the future will not lag
to meet the past and, springing, claim her pre-Fall prize.
We will soon move forward toward no fall's reprise.*

*Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.
Dona nobis pacem.*

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.
Grant us peace. – Luke Schelhaas

III. We Know Him

Here is one who made a world
and spoke into the void of night.
We know him by the words he formed:
land and mammal, rain and light.

And here is one who chose to love,
and died when those he loved drew back.
We know him by the things we miss:
his face, his peace, a true love's lack.

And here is one who swore to save,
and gave a history for the telling.
We know him in the story told:
of love and long-awaited healing.

And here is one who gave a son—
a savior gave—to heal time.
We know him at the savior's birth:
a dawn marked by a Christmas chime.

And here is one who calmed the storms,
and broke the bread for those who sinned.
We know him in these elements:
the bread, the wine, the rain, the wind.

And here is one who died for us,
and rose again, and raced to heaven.
We know him in the comforter:
the dove, the fire, the ransom given. — *Luke Schelhaas*

IV. Give Us Love

On our knees we freely come, Lord,
Father of the King of love.
Holy Spirit, give us power,
power from your throne above.
Come, Lord Jesus, live within us,
fill us, through us ever flow.
Plant us firm within your love, Lord,
love surpassing all we know.

Help us feel your fervent love now,
Love that lifted saints before.
May it turn us from a Thomas
to your child forevermore.
Once you turned the heart of Peter;
Once you turned the heart of Saul.
Send your Spirit, sure to turn us;
turn our hearts to heed your call.

You can turn the rebel's heart, Lord,
by your touch, dissolve our fears.
When we sin and weep for sinning,
your shed blood cleans all our years.
Glory be to God the Father,
glory be to God the Son;
glory to the Holy Spirit—
tune our hearts to make us one. — *Mike Vanden Bosch*