

Music for the End of Time

“**Music for the End of Time**” is a 50-minute work for trombone and quadraphonic electronics based on the *Book of Revelation*. We used our experience with music theater to attempt a kind of dramatic tone poem for trombone and computer. We explore all aspects of the trombone, ranging from symphonic expressions of “divine wrath,” to wild rhythmic unisons with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, to the gentlest, meditative lyricism. These are the movements and the verses they are based upon:

I. A Door Was Opened in Heaven,

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven... (Rev. 4:1.)

II. The Sea of Glass

And before the throne was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. (Rev. 4.6)

III. The Four Horsemen

And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. (Rev. 9:17)

IV. As It Were A Trumpet Talking

...and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. (Rev. 4:1.)

V. The White Beast

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:8)

VI. A Woman Clothed With the Sun

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. (Rev. 12:1)

We were drawn to the *Book of Revelation* more by its rich imagery and symbolism than any sort of doctrinaire religious belief. At times, St. John's writing is quite transcendental, but at others, its embittered visions are almost insanely horrific. In this sense, parts of “Music for the End of Time” follow in the traditions of “crazy” composers as exemplified by Mussorgsky's “Night On Bald Mountain,” Berlioz's “Symphony Fantastique,” and some of the deeply bi-polar melancholy/exuberance of Schumann and Mahler. In some

cases, it is exactly this form of “folly” that allows for transcendental experience. We often found that the cinematic bias of MIDI technology was

more useful for creating the large dramatic arch of “Music for the End of Time” than more advanced instruments like MAX/MSP and C-Sound.

When approaching apocalyptic visions, which are often very violent, it is important to carefully consider their implications. On one hand, these visions have helped humans appreciate the extreme limitation of our existential condition in relation to the boundless majesty of the universe.

But apocalyptic visions can also lead to misappropriated notions of divine justice, or even divine wrath that are anything but transcendental. Such visions are often not divine at all, but rather very human expressions of contempt and hatred for those we ourselves deem unworthy. In a world that seems to increasingly reflect imperialistic hubris, and in a world with increasing beliefs about the divinity of murdering others, the dangers of misappropriated apocalyptic visions should not be underestimated.

Patriarchal transcendentalism tends toward recurrent cycles of ecstasy, revolution, destruction and lament. These polarities inform the arrangement of the movements in *Music for the End of Time*, and shape their cycles of light/darkness, drama/reflection, ecstasy/remorse. This is especially notable in “The Four Horsemen,” where a sort of symphonic intensity and lamentive reflection alternate like repeated charges of horsemen.

Ultimately, the most meaningful understandings of the apocalyptic have little to do with destruction, but with vanquishing our own human limitations. Through the apocalyptic, we transcend not so much the universe, as our own self. We learn that in the infinite expanse of this world, our human passions are often the sheerest folly, and that the truest path to justice is through forgiveness, compassion and love.

Perhaps that understanding is what St. John hoped to symbolize in his vision of “The Woman Clothed with the Sun.” The ultimate value of transcendental experience might be that it shows us that nothing is more precious or transcendent than the simple beauty of life itself.

Abbie Conant

Abbie Conant is somewhat of a legend in the brass world. She was principal trombone of the Munich Philharmonic for 13 years and recorded a critically acclaimed CD entitled, Trombone and Organ/Posaune und Orgel. The story of her struggle for equal treatment and the same pay as her male colleagues in the Munich Philharmonic appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Der Spiegel* and many other newspapers and makes up the last chapter of Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink* which was on the New York Times bestseller list for 18 weeks. A full length documentary called, “Abbie Conant, Alone Among Men,”



was aired several times on 3-SAT European television. With her composer-husband William Osborne she has created a grippingly dramatic repertoire of music theatre works for acting/singing trombonist. The artist couple has toured to over 140 cities in Europe and the USA with their own multimedia productions. Abbie has given masterclasses at the Juilliard School, Indiana University, Yale School of Music, New England Conservatory, Eastman School of Music, Manchester School of Music among many others. She has been a juror on several international trombone competitions including Porcia, Geneva, Lieksa and the N.A. Rimksy-Korsakov. The *International Trombone Association Journal* has featured Abbie Conant in a cover article and described her as "in the first rank of world class trombonists". She performs internationally as a concerto soloist, recitalist, improviser and performance artist. In 1992 the Baden-Württemberg State Ministry for Education, in recognition of her international reputation as a trombonist, named her full tenured Professor of Trombone at the esteemed Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Trossingen, Germany. In 1996 the 4200 members of the International Trombone Association elected her as their President-Elect. Her International Trombone Camp, which was founded in 1987 in Germany and Italy, has featured guest artists such as Joe Alessi, Charles Vernon, Michael Mulcahy, Jiggs Whigham, Carsten Svanberg, Heinz Fadle, Stuart Dempster, Ingemar Roos, Jay Friedman and others. She has recently founded the world's first Trombone Chamber Music Institute.

William Osborne

studied with George Crumb in Philadelphia and with Franco Donatoni at the National Academy of Italy. Among his awards are two from the American Society of Authors, Composers, and Publishers, a Doctoral Fellowship to Columbia University, and a prize from the Munich Theater Commission. Since 1993 his works have been performed in over 140 cities in North America and Europe.



Our Spring Tour Itinerary 2009

Internationaler Posaunenverein Festival in Stuttgart
(Featured soloist)

The University of Texas at El Paso

The University of Nevada at Las Vegas

Cal State Northridge

University of the Redlands

Sacramento State University

University of Southern Oregon

University of Washington

University of Puget Sound

San Jose State University

University of California, Berkeley (CNMAT)

University of Southern California

University of California, Irvine

Cal State Fullerton (Featured soloist of Trombone Day)

March 8

March 12-13

March 16-17

March 19

March 22-23

March 26-27

April 3-4

April 6-7

April 9

April 15-16

April 17

April 20

April 22

April 25

Spring Tour 2009

Abbie Conant and William Osborne

Music for the End of Time

(For trombone, video and computer generated quadruphonics tape.)

I. A Door Was Opened In HeavenThe Sea of Glass

II. The Sea of Glass

III. The Four Horsemen

IV. As It Were of a Trumpet Talking

V. The White Beast

VI. A Woman Clothed With the Sun

(movements performed without pauses)

Abbie Conant, trombone

William Osborne, composer

*This tour is made possible, in part, through the support of
C.G. Conn - the maker of Conn trombones.*

Instructions for assembling the program.

Copy the two pages front and back on a single sheet of paper and fold in the middle.