

Descriptive note:

The Geography of Loss was written rapidly in Fall of 2010 as a response to the death of my parents, who passed in rapid succession in that Spring (my mother in February, my father in May). Both were advanced in years, had lived good lives, and their ends were not a surprise. As such, I have little to complain about, but of course their absence (especially since I am an only child) remains vivid.

The germ of the piece was the central choral movement *Fear No*, which I wrote in April 2010 soon after my mother's death. Its text, while original, reflected the spirit of a text from Shakespeare she had arranged in advance for me to read at her funeral.

From that beginning, I came to feel that a larger work was necessary, especially once my father died. The choruses emerged as an expression of my Buddhist practice. The "Anxiety Overture", the two Portraits, and the Double Portrait were an evocation of the personalities and struggles of my parents.

The text of "Last Words" is a transcription of fragmentary utterances by my father from his hospital bedside during the last two weeks of his life. (The baritone delivers his words, the chorus mine and that of hospital staff. Many of the sounds from the medical machinery in the room work their way into musical material.) And "Going Solo" was originally a work for unaccompanied voice that I wrote in 2002 as a response to my divorce. Now I felt it took on a new meaning, and I added this accompaniment.

The musical character of the work alternates between austere, brittle instrumental writing (until the last movement) and much more tonal consonant choral writing. All, however, are governed by the same harmonic system guided by overtone relations and connections. I feel that Bach cantatas, late Stravinsky, and Arvo Pärt all have a role in guiding my ear, towards what I hope remains a personal statement. ---Robert Carl

Texts (exact and immediate repetitions are not included):

2. Chorale 1

Open, empty.

3. Portraits

Chorale 2a

Open, empty.

Chorale 2b

Empty.

4. Fear No

*Fear no phantom.
Fear no shadow.
Fear no darkness.
Fear no burning light.
Fear no monster.
Fear no demon.
Fear no panic.
Fear no fright.*

5. Last Words

*I'm so happy to see you.
I love to see you.
I'm barely ar...
(I'm here.)
I'm here too.*

*Terrific, wonderful, thank you.
Enough.
I'm sorry.*

*I smell something burning.
My thumb is burning.
My thumb is burning!
Ah!
Intervene!
(We're coming.)
Put it in water.
Thank you.*

*Both watches are waterproof.
Please excuse my noise.*

*Is it Thursday?
What does the clock say?
I want you to...
You really have to...
It's that way, isn't it?*

Is that picture for sale?

*Who will pay for this?
Is it on top of?*

Let's go.

6. Choral 3

Open, empty.
Open, endless.
Open, endless,
Open spacious.
Endless.
Spacious.
Endless.
Empty, empty, open.
Open, empty.
Open, rising.
Open, rising, rounded, boundless.
Open, empty.

8. Going Solo

Going solo.
So low.
Sowing, low.
Sowing, go.
Oh Soul, Go.
Go, oh Soul.
Souling go.
Oh Soul.
Oh.
Go so low.
Soul Oh.
Oh Soul, Oh.
Oh Soul, Low.
Oh Soul,
Oh Soul, Low.
So low,
Oh Soul.

(Chorus: Oh...)

*[All texts original, by composer, except words of Robert A. Carl,
transcribed in No.5]*