

CARL VINE

*The Tree
of Man*

A SECULAR CANTATA FOR SOPRANO
AND STRING ORCHESTRA

(2012)

FULL SCORE

FABER *ff* MUSIC

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Text © 1956 by Patrick White
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The Tree of Man was commissioned by the Australian Chamber Orchestra for its national concert tour with soprano Danielle de Niese in June 2012.

The Tree of Man was first performed by Danielle de Niese and the Australian Chamber Orchestra conducted by Richard Tognetti at the Wollongong Town Hall, Wollongong, Australia on 7 June 2012

Duration: 11 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION

high voice
violins I (with soloist)
violins II (with soloist)
violas
cellos
double basses

Orchestral parts available on hire from the publishers
A larger-sized conductor's score is available for hire on request from the publishers

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TEXT

In the end there are the trees. These still stand in the gully behind the house, on a piece of poor land that nobody wants to use. There is the ugly mass of scrub, full of whips and open secrets. But there are the trees, quite a number of them that have survived the axe, smooth ones, a sculpture of trees. On still mornings after frost these stand streaming with light and moisture, the white and the ashen, and some the colour of flesh.

... There is silence, and a stone lizard. And a dog that has died recently. ... The dusty dog lying with his muzzle turned sideways on his paws in perfect simplicity of death.

The rather leggy, pale boy comes down later into the bush. He is mooning there, and rubbing his forehead against the bark of trees. He is breaking twigs, and making little heaps of sticks in various patterns. He is writing in the sand, and expecting precious stones in the surfaces of rocks.

... He would write a poem, he said, dragging his head from side to side in the sand. ... He would write a poem of life, of all life, of what he did not know, but knew. Of all people, even the closed ones, who do open on asphalt and in trains.

He would make the trains run on silver lines, the people still dreaming on their shelves, who will wake up soon enough and feel for their money and their teeth. Little bits of coloured thought, that he had suddenly, and would look at for a long time, would go into his poem, and urgent telegrams, and the pieces of torn letters that fall out of metal baskets.

... His poem was growing. It would have the smell of bread, and the rather grey wisdom of youth, and his grandmother's kumquats, and girls with yellow plaits exchanging love-talk behind their hands, and the blood thumping like a drum, and red apples, and a little wisp of white cloud that will swell into a horse and trample the whole sky once it gets the wind inside it.

As his poem mounted in him he could not bear it, or rather, what was still his impotence. And after a bit, not knowing what else to do but scribble on the already scribbled trees, he went back to the house in which his grandfather had died, taking with him his greatness, which was still a secret.

So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them with his head drooping as he increased in stature. Putting out shoots of green thought. So that, in the end, there was no end.

© Patrick White 1956

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PROGRAMME NOTE

I was delighted when the Australian Chamber Orchestra invited me to compose something to celebrate the centenary of Patrick White's birth in 2012. I came to know Patrick while writing music for several of his stage plays in the 1980's. At that time I also composed a concert aria, prosaically titled *Aria* (1984), using text Patrick wrote as a preliminary essay for an opera that he dearly wanted to create, but which never materialised.

My favourites among White's novels are *The Vivisector* and *The Tree of Man*. Both sit for me near the pinnacle of English literature, but the latter kindly provides, in its short final chapter, a concise summary, not of the action of the rest of the book, but somehow of its very essence.

Old Stan Parker has died, leaving his estranged, curious and imaginative grandson wandering through the unmistakably 'Australian' patch of land that infused the old man's life. Both characters represent aspects of White. The elder spent a lifetime navigating the terrible complexities arising from the simplest human interactions; the younger seeks to convert the inexpressibility of life into words.

The language of chapter 26 is stunningly evocative while using remarkably simple vocabulary. It symbolises in prose the very poem that the boy vows to write. I wanted to avoid setting the whole thing as recitative, the operatic form that uses staggering rhythms to denote words spoken 'naturally'. Fortunately, the text is full of lilting, natural and repetitive rhythms, which I have heightened with simple stepwise melody and accompaniment that emphasises its regularities. Although this setting contains little plain triadic harmony, I have endeavoured to reflect, in every aspect of the music, the simplicity and sincerity of the novel's language.

It is dedicated to Danielle de Niese, and was written in memory of Patrick White (1912–1990).

CV

The Tree of Man

PATRICK WHITE

CARL VINE

$\text{♩} = 56$

High Voice *mp* (with grace, simplicity and expressiveness)

In the end, in the end

Violin I *mp* senza vib. *p* poco vibrato

Violin II *mp* senza vib. *p* poco vibrato

Viola *mp* senza vib. *p* poco vibrato

Cello *mp* senza vib. sim. *p* poco vibrato

Double bass *mp* senza vib. sim. *p* pizz.

7

Vce. there are the trees. These still stand in the gul-ly be-hind the house, on a piece of poor land

Vln I sim.

Vln II sim.

Vla sim.

Vc. sim.

Db. sim.

12

Vce. that no-bo-dy wants to use. There is the ug-ly mass of scrub, full of whips and o-pen se-crets.

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Db.

17 **A**

Vce. *But there are the trees, _____ quite a num-ber of them that have sur-viv'd the axe,*

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Db.

21

Vce. *smooth ones, a sculp-ture of trees. On still morn-ings_ af-ter frost these stand stream-ing with*

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc.

Db.

25

Vce. *light and mois-ture,___ light and mois- ture,___ the white and the ash - en,___*

Vln I *pp*

Vln II *pp*

Vla *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Db. *p*