

Good Medicine from Salome Dances for Peace

(1986)

Terry Riley (b. 1935)

Terry Riley first came to prominence in 1964 when he subverted the world of tightly organized atonal composition then in fashion. With the groundbreaking In C—a work built upon steady pulse throughout, simple repeated melodic motives, and static harmonies—Riley achieved an elegant and non-nostalgic return to tonality. In demonstrating the hypnotic allure of complex musical patterns made of basic means, he produced the seminal work of the so-called “minimal” school.

Riley’s facility for complex pattern-making is the product of his virtuosity as a keyboard improviser. He quit formal composition following In C in order to concentrate on improvisation, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s he became known for weaving dazzlingly intricate skeins of music from improvisations on organ and synthesizer. At this time, Riley also devoted himself to studying North Indian vocal techniques under the legendary Pandit Pran Nath, and a new element entered his music: long-limbed melody. From his work in Indian music, moreover, he became interested in the subtle distinctions of tuning that would be hard to achieve with a traditional classical ensemble.

Riley began notating music again in 1979, expressly at David Harrington’s request, when both he and the Kronos Quartet were on the faculty at Mills College in Oakland. By collaborating with Kronos, he discovered that his various musical passions could be integrated, not as pastiche, but as different sides of similar musical impulses that still maintained something of the oral performing traditions of India and jazz. Riley’s first quartets were inspired by his keyboard improvisations, but his knowledge of string quartets became more sophisticated through his work with Kronos, combining rigorous compositional ideas with a more performance-oriented approach. Kronos’ long relationship with Riley has produced over 25 new works.

Good Medicine is the last section of Salome Dances for Peace, an epic, two-hour-long string quartet. About Salome Riley has said:

The idea for Salome Dances for Peace came out of an improvisation theme from The Harp of New Albion. I realized this was potentially a whole new piece. Around that time, David Harrington called me and asked me to write another string quartet. I thought that it should be a ballet about Salome using her alluring

powers to actually create peace in the world. So Salome in this case becomes like a goddess who—drawn out of antiquity, having done evil kinds of deeds—reincarnates and is trained as a sorceress, as a shaman. And through her dancing, she is able to become both a warrior and an influence on the world leaders’ actions.

I’m always trying to find ways that I can, besides doing music, contribute to world peace, or maybe neighborhood peace or home peace. I told David when we first started that I thought we ought to create a piece that can be played at the United Nations on special holidays. It would not be just a concert piece but a piece that could be played as a rite.

—Terry Riley

Terry Riley’s Salome Dances for Peace was commissioned for Kronos by IRCAM (the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music) and Betty Freeman, and recorded by Kronos for Nonesuch Records.

Darmstadt Kindergarten (2015)

Mark Applebaum (b. 1967)

Darmstadt Kindergarten consists of a seventeen-measure “theme” composed in two versions: instrumental and choreographic. The instrumental version is played conventionally on two violins, viola, and cello; the choreographic version calls for the players to substitute silent hand gestures—lavishly described in the score—for their instrumental sounds.

The instrumental “theme” is repeated five times in immediate succession. During each successive statement one additional player is permanently removed from the instrumental group and instead plays the choreographic version. The hand gestures are executed at precise moments corresponding to the rhythms from the player’s instrumental part. *Darmstadt Kindergarten* is thus a piece that is partly about memory; the audience is invited to “hear” the instrumental material when later voiced by choreographed action. Music can indeed be expressed even in the absence of sound.

The title alludes to the famous summer music courses held in Darmstadt, Germany. For decades composers such as Cage, Boulez, Nono, and Stockhausen met to share their latest musical sounds and ideas. The festival came to be known as a hotbed of the most gritty, modernist contemporary music, stuff aimed decidedly at mature audiences and, as a consequence, sometimes lacking the ludic sense of play that makes childlike enterprise so appealing (and perhaps in need of rehabilitation).

Commissioned originally for a Kronos Quartet’s children’s concert, I wanted to compose a piece that could appeal at once to audiences of varying age, experience, and affinity for levity, gravity, whimsy, and rigor—something worthy of a “Darmstadt kindergarten.”

—Mark Applebaum

Mark Applebaum’s Darmstadt Kindergarten was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund.

Oberek for Terry Riley (2015)

Aleksander Kościów (b. 1974)

Oberek for Terry Riley was written for the Kronos Quartet as a musical gift to celebrate Terry Riley’s 80th birthday. Its inspiration comes from one of the most characteristic Polish dances, the oberek, known for its endless trance-like repetitiveness and vigorous circle-shaped motion—features which appear here as a tribute to Riley, who has made both repetitiveness and reduced material one of the most prominent and productive mechanisms in contemporary musical language. The need for pure joy is a human, natural expression, taking shape in dance and music—a simple truth known by everyone—and this is what the piece hopes to serve for such a great occasion.

—Aleksander Kościów

Aleksander Kościów’s Oberek for Terry Riley was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund.

String Quartet No. 3, The Mezzanine (2012)

Nathaniel Stookey (b. 1970)

We composers often go to great lengths to discourage our audience from looking for connections between our music and the titles we give it. In the case of my third quartet, the music really is about escalators, drinking straws, shoelaces, vending machines, and cigarette butts. If it doesn’t sound that way to you, I apologize; I did my best with what I had. I would like to thank Nicholson Baker for forever changing my world-view, and David Harrington for forever changing the string quartet.

—Nathaniel Stookey

Nathaniel Stookey’s String Quartet No. 3, The Mezzanine, was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation with additional support from the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation.

Flow (2010)

Laurie Anderson (b. 1947)

Arranged by Jacob Garchik (1976)

Laurie Anderson is one of America's most renowned—and daring—creative pioneers. Her work, which encompasses music, visual art, poetry, film, and photography, has challenged and delighted audiences around the world for more than 30 years. Anderson is best known for her multimedia presentations and musical recordings. Anderson's first album, *O Superman*, launched her recording career in 1980, rising to number two on the British pop charts and subsequently appearing on her landmark release *Big Science*. She went on to record six more albums with Warner Brothers. In 2001, Anderson recorded her first album with Nonesuch Records, the critically lauded *Life on a String*, followed by *Homeland* in 2010. The original version of *Flow* is the final track on *Homeland*, and was nominated for a Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Performance. Recent multimedia productions include *Delusion* (2010) and *Dirtday* (2011), the third in a cycle that also included the works *Happiness* (2001) and *The End of the Moon* (2004). Anderson collaborated with the Kronos Quartet on the 2013 work *Landfall*. Anderson's visual and installation work has been presented since 1980 in major museums throughout the world. In addition, she has directed several films and recorded many works for film and dance.

Jacob Garchik's arrangement of *Flow* by Laurie Anderson was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund.

Silent Cranes (2015)

Mary Kouyoumdjian (b. 1983)

April 24, 2015 marks the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, a tragic event that led to the mass extermination of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks and was the first genocide of the 20th century. While over 20 countries and 43 U.S. states have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide, modern-day Turkey has yet to do so and threatens imprisonment to those who push the topic within its borders. Even now, 100 years later, this historic event continues to be just as unresolved as it was before. As an Armenian-American composer who values freedom of speech and whose family fled the genocide, I feel this is an essential time to remember those who were lost, while continuing a dialogue about what happened and how we can prevent further genocides from happening in the future.

Silent Cranes is inspired by the Armenian folk song *Groung (Crane)* in which the singer calls out to the migratory bird, begging for word from their homeland, only to have the crane respond with silence and fly away. The first, second, and fourth movement titles quote directly from the folk song lyrics. Those who were lost during the genocide are cranes in their own way, unable to speak of the horrors that happened, and it is the responsibility of the living to give them a voice.

The prerecorded backing track includes testimonies by genocide survivors, recordings from the genocide era of Armenian folk songs, and a poem from investigative journalist David Barsamian in response to the question "Why is it important to talk about the Armenian Genocide 100 years later?"

Special thanks to those who shared their history, to those who contributed recordings, to David Barsamian for his words and light, and to the Kronos Quartet and Kronos Performing Arts Association for telling this story that so desperately needs to be heard. *Silent Cranes* is dedicated to those lost and to those living who can promote change.

—Mary Kouyoumdjian

Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Silent Cranes* was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet with support from the David Harrington Research and Development Fund, the Angel Stoyanof Commission Fund, Zvart and Rouben Potoukian, Andrea A. Lunsford, Gates McFadden and Robert Straus, Dayna Sumiyoshi and Greg Smedsrud, many funders in the Indiegogo community, and other generous individuals. It was premiered on April 29, 2015, by the Kronos Quartet at the Yerevan Perspectives 16th International Music Festival in the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Yerevan, Armenia.

Folk Songs:

Groung (Crane) performed by Komitas Vardapet / Armenak Shah Muradian and *Andouni (Homeless)* performed by Komitas Vardapet in Paris, France, 1912 (courtesy of Traditional Crossroads); *Groung (Crane)* performed by Zabelle Panosian in Harlem, New York, 1916 (courtesy of Tompkins Square)

Survivor Testimonies:

Araxie Barsamian, Bishop Hagop, Victoria Mellian, (courtesy of David Barsamian); Haig Baronian, Aghavnie Der Sarkissian, Elise Hagopian Taft, Nium Sukkar, (courtesy of the Armenian Film Foundation); Azniv Guiragossian (interviewed by Taleen Babayan and the composer)

Poetry:

David Barsamian, excerpts from "A Century...."

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Kronos Quartet/Kronos Performing Arts Association

P. O. Box 225340

San Francisco, CA 94122-5340 USA

kronosquartet.org

facebook.com/kronosquartet

instagram.com/kronos_quartet

Twitter: @kronosquartet #kronos

The Kronos Quartet records for Nonesuch Records.