# Faith Based Initiatives

music by
## Rodney Lister

Charles Blandy
(tenor)

Jonah Sirota
(viola)

Chiara Quartet

Collage New Music

David Hoose
(conductor)

métier

# Faith-Based Initiatives

Rodney Lister (b. 1951)

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| 1 | | Faith-Based Initiative | | 9:06 |
| Complicated Grief | | | | 23:38 |
| 2 | I. | Fantasia | 7:51 | |
| 3 | II. | Variance | 12:25 | |
| 4 | III. | Quodlibet | 3:21 | |
| Friendly Fire | | | | 39:08 |
| 5 | I. | Ode to the Confederate Dead | 11:04 | |
| 6 | II. | The Fury of Aerial Bombardment | 1:53 | |
| 7 | III. | Women, Children, Babies, Cows, Cats | 1:19 | |
| 8 | IV. | Losses | 5:36 | |
| 9 | V. | The March into Virginia | 2:50 | |
| 10 | VI. | The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner | 0:35 | |
| 11 | VII. | Ashbah (The ghosts of American soldiers) | 2:24 | |
| 12 | VIII. | A Box Comes Home | 4:04 | |
| 13 | IX. | The Certainty | 1:35 | |
| 14 | X. | For the Union Dead | 7:29 | |
| Total playing time including pauses: | | | | 72:11 |

Chiara Quartet (track 1)
*Rebecca Fischer & Hyeyung Yoon, violins, Jonah Sirota, viola, Gregory Beaver, cello*
Jonah Sirota, solo viola (tracks 2-4)
Charles Blandy, tenor,
Collage New Music, David Hoose, conductor (tracks 5-14)

# For the Union Dead: An important note

On this recording, there is an utterance of the *n-word* in Lowell's "For the Union Dead", by a white singer, in a setting by a white composer, in a work by a white poet. As the actor Mahershala Ali put it a few years ago, "anytime a non-black person ... says [the n-word] in a space, there's a mini-explosion that goes off within you" — a visceral reaction which does not admit of context or intent.

I have dreaded the possibility of causing such harm here. And it's not for us to decide what reactions are "reasonable" and which are not.

We have been torn between wishing to avoid harm, and the obligation *to be faithful to the* ***anti-racist*** *content of the poem itself.* The poet Robert Lowell puts the word in quotes, to ascribe it to the Confederates who unceremoniously buried the bodies of the 54th infantry. Like the sculpture it describes, Lowell intends his poem to "[stick] like a fishbone in the city's throat". Bowdlerizing the text (thereby whitewashing the history it references) would drain the poem of some of its provocative power.

This poem has been called "as canonical as they come, an indisputable masterwork by an indispensable American poet."[i] Unlike, say, *Huckleberry Finn,* I haven't found an instance of someone calling particular attention to the word in its entire 60+ year history. Several audio readings by renowned poets, including by Lowell himself, can be found online. Poets of various races (Claudia Rankine, Natasha Trethewey, Kevin Young, notably) have responded creatively to this poem. And when we performed and recorded the piece in 2013-2014, this subject simply never came up.

But mores on use of the word have changed, even since then. I certainly don't wish this to seem like rationalizing its wider use by white folks. Maybe it's special pleading, but I do think this case is different: Art is a place where we confront and process horrifying realities.

As a practical matter, we considered "bleeping" the word out; removing it from the vocal track (which is not very well-isolated in the mix); or suppressing the piece entirely. We concluded that these alternatives were all either infeasible, and/or lacked integrity. So it remains. We humbly ask the listener to apply the Principle of Charity in hearing the word in its intended context; and to not miss out on Lowell's challenge to the "savage servility" of business as usual, that allows racism to fester. The poem is as timely in Boston of 2022 as in 1960.

*Charles Blandy*

# The Music

## Faith-Based Initiative

The title of my piece has several different meanings. The most obvious one is the reference to the governmental program which is one of the means by which the Bush administration attempted to obliterate the separation of church and state in the United States. Among the other meanings are references to my own religious beliefs, the fact that the piece is a sort of chorale prelude, and my decision at the outset of the composition of the piece that, if I wrote it, somehow it would get played by somebody, sooner or later.

*Faith-Based Initiative* is based on a hymn tune which is sung to words beginning "Come, Thou Font of Every Blessing." This tune is in a number of Ives pieces, including his first String Quartet. The piece is in five sections, of which the first, third, and fifth are more obviously directly related to the tune; the second, consisting of frenetically scurrying music, and the fourth, which is a series of three conjoined sort of fugal expositions, each faster than the last, are less obviously related to it. For a while now I've been interested in the challenge of integrating smoothly and convincingly into one work different tonal languages, and this piece reflects that concern.

## Complicated Grief

When Jonah Sirota asked me to write a piece for him he said that he didn't want an elegy. I suggested some chorale preludes on southern hymn tunes which I think I described to him as being "tacky," by which I meant not the intellectually respectable, almost folk tunes, like *From the Sacred Harp*, but the poppy, sort of honky-tonk hymn tunes I grew up hearing on TV and radio and sort of love. About the time I started working on the piece my father died, and the tunes and working with them became intertwined in my mind with a whole raft of thoughts about my life and my relationship with my father, and my feelings about him and his death. At about this time I also encountered, on a radio show, for the first time the phrase

"complicated grief," which is a clinical term referring to a grief which is so great that it overwhelms a person's ability to function. This didn't at all describe my state of mind, but the phrase was very striking to me and, in that it had several different potential meanings, and I decided to use it as the title of the piece I was working on. It's still not exactly an elegy…

My general approach to these tunes was to deconstruct them, reducing them to their basic thematic elements and then developing those elements on their own and various kinds of combinations with the tunes themselves. The first movement is a fantasy on its tune, whose parts are basically presented in reverse order. As I pronounce them I don't make a distinction between the words "variants" and "variance." I started out thinking that I would call the second movement "variants," the idea being, as in folksong collecting, presenting different versions of what is essentially the same tune, but as I was working on it the very clear sectional divisions of the beginning of the piece began dissolving and melting into one another as it went along, and "variance" began to seem to be the more correct term for what was happening. The third movement is a quodlibet, combining three tunes, each in a different key, the bits of which all eventually morph into the same key as they end.

For information's sake, the tunes used in the piece are: *I Come to the Garden Alone*, in the first movement, *How Great Thou Art*, the in second, and, in the third*, I Know Who Holds Tomorrow*, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling*, and *When They Ring Those Golden Bells For You and Me.*

**Friendly Fire**

My first thoughts about writing what eventually became *Friendly Fire* began after seeing the Ken Burns Civil War documentary series. So much about it was so moving and exciting that I began to wonder if (wish that) it were possible to do something that would be anywhere nearly as powerful or meaningful. Pondering

over that went on for a while. When the Gulf War started I found myself reading poetry about war and American warriors from different times. The thoughts about writing something resurfaced and I began to think about poems that I could set in such a piece, and thought about how to order them, but still kept pondering. When the Gulf War was over, I, foolishly, assumed that we were done with war, and although I might do something it would be after the fact. Meanwhile, pondering kept on. Events, of course, proved that the idea of American participation in wars was not at all a thing of the past. It was well after the beginning of the Iraq War when I actually started work on writing this piece that had been projected for years, and even then that work was preceded by the composition of two fairly large pieces which allowed me to get familiar with the sort of material I wanted to work with.

At some point in this process, I decided that I would like the setting of the Melville poem about the first battle of Bull Run to be in the manner of a song by Ives which is a favorite of mine, *In Flanders Fields.* The voice part of *In Flanders Fields* consists of phrases whose notes are fragments of various patriotic songs (in addition to the Marseillaise), and I decided I wanted the voice part of my setting of the Melville to be cobbled together from phrases of several Civil War songs (*The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, *Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom*, *Columbia the Gem of the Ocean*, *Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Ground*, *The Bonnie Blue Flag*, and *Dixie*), whose notes, manipulated in various ways, would then become the source of the settings of the rest of the poems.

*Friendly Fire* is framed by settings of *The Ode to the Confederate* Dead by Tate and *For the Union Dead* by Lowell, with the Melville poem in the middle. Between those large poems are settings of smaller poems which have to do with later American wars. In the beginning I planned to have three poems on either side of the Melville, but when I got to know the work of Brian Turner, a poet who was a veteran of the Iraq War, I decided that I wanted to include a poem of his, even if it messed up the symmetry I originally projected. The internal poems trace a non-chronological thread dealing first with the personal experience of the participants and later with the

perspective of the survivors, ending with Denise Levertov's reflections on the clinical language developed during the Gulf War to distance the American people from the realities of war. The whole sequence intertwines the experiences of the Civil War, the first modern war and possibly the most formative for the United States with those of later American wars, maybe joining them into a single strand.

*Rodney Lister*

## An Appreciation by Nico Muhly

This collection of Rodney Lister's music shows him at his most versatile. It offers a view of a composer whose output is both lyrical and abstract, with a poetic command of foreground and background, consonance and dissonance. Often, the core of the work is a borrowed or found fragment, in particular American hymn tunes, which are charged with meaning both concrete and fleeting. On hearing a familiar (or almost-familiar) tune played by a violin rather than sung, the ear is obliged to fill in the words, and the mind is invited to complete the phrase. In this way, the tunes become fixed locations of stability, but also subject to perversion, shading, and subtle but unsettling modifications.

This is particularly clear in the string quartet *Faith-Based Initiative* (2004), about which the composer writes, "For a while now I've been interested in the challenge of integrating smoothly and convincingly into one work different tonal languages." The mechanism by which he achieves this smoothness is, ironically, by subjecting an entirely consonant and familiar hymn to a slow process of expansion, contraction, and harmonic manipulation. The first minute of the piece is a simple exposition of the tune, played in the viola. After the final cadence of the phrase, we begin to see clouds in the distance, the harmonic language becomes suddenly gnarlier, and the steady, reverential footprint of the hymn suddenly dissolves into a percussive landscape in mixed meter, with jagged phrases bounced between the instruments. From here, another little tune appears and ushers the section to a quick close. The

subsequent “chorale” section combines the abstract, slightly twisted harmonic language of the previous section with the earnest and straightforward rhythms of the opening phrases of the piece. We remain in this landscape for a while, as it dissolves into a rich but rhythmically straightforward contrapuntal section led by the second violin. The notes become shorter, we hear faster notes working against the beat, and the composer instructs the musicians: “Increasingly Intense.” The final phrases of the piece reïntroduce the hymn-tune, with initial small flickers of the knotty material in the viola, which finally half-resolves the hymn tune in its original C-major simplicity.

There is a political subtext to the work, as well; the composer writes: “The title of my piece has several different meanings. The most obvious one is the reference to the governmental program which is one of the means by which the Bush administration attempted to obliterate the separation of church and state in the United States.” In this sense, the logic of the piece is an encoding of the process of taking something putatively simple and pure and turning it into something grotesque; the piece invites us to reflect on this tension.

The virtuosic viola solo *Complicated Grief* (2013-2014), is, in the words of the composer “not exactly an elegy,” but it shares overlaps emotionally with that genre. It is, in a sense, a memory piece about the composer’s father (who died during the composition of the work), and a memory piece about childhood and the sorts of musical fragments one carries into the complicated stages of adulthood. Here, the fragments are “[…] southern hymn tunes which I think I described to him as being “tacky,” by which I meant not the intellectually respectable, almost folktunes, like from the Sacred Harp, but the poppy, sort of honky-tonk hymn tunes I grew up hearing on TV and radio and sort of love.”

The fundamental compositional energy behind all three movements of this piece is one of *plasticity*. Unlike in *Faith-Based Initiative*, the tunes here come in and out of focus not just in terms of foreground and background, but as they relate to one

another. It reminds me, in a sense, of old friends who can finish one another's sentences, or of being in a conversation where no topic is ever finished, and is allowed to be subjected to sudden or gradual changes of tack. The physical appearance of the viola part in the second movement echoes this sentiment: it is untraditionally notated over two staves, with the lower staff being played in the ordinary fashion, and the upper staff being *sul ponticello*, which is to say, with the bow above the bridge of the instrument, creating a powerfully evocative and strange sound. The sound of an old phonograph comes to mind, and the interplay between these two techniques reflects the sense of a memory coming to haunt a present reality.

*Complicated Grief* ends with a quodlibet, a kind of musical tapas, in which popular tunes are lined up in quick succession. The composer often blurs where one tune begins and another ends, creating a sense of permeability between foreground and background. Here, the violist is asked to play two lines simultaneously for much of the movement, with intense physical requirements from the violist Jonah Sirota, who commissioned the work. It alternates not just between the remembered melodies, but between moments of gentle and lyrical playing, and music that sounds like a primal scream, with an intensity of pitch, content, and energy.

*Friendly Fire* (2007-2012), a charged and powerful work touching on American wars from the Civil War through the Iraq War. The composer writes, "The whole sequence intertwines the experiences of the Civil War, the first modern war and possibly the most formative for the United States with those of later American wars, maybe joining them into a single strand." With a piece of this length, the composer's first project is to choose texts, and here, the poems are organized with a non-chronological poetry that draws connections across time; when Richard Eberhart writes, about the second world war, that God "looks on shock-pried faces" and then we hear Brian Turner writing "And the Iraqi dead, / they watch in silence from rooftops" we are invited to draw a curved line between two very different times, and between two very different poets.

A distinct feature of *Friendly Fire* is the declarative way the text is delivered. Almost entirely devoid of melisma, the vocal writing is designed carefully, so the text is always crystal-clear. Even in the tricker, wordier sections, or when the ensemble works in and around the voice, each word is as audible and legible as speech. This clarity allows the ensemble to create much of the abstraction the texts require. A through-line of the instrumental writing is the violin and viola playing quick passages, often at variance with the key in which the voice is singing. The effect is not an aggressive dissonance, but it gives the ear a sense of something just out of view.

The harmonic language of the piece is widely varied; even taking two core samples from the first few seconds of *Losses* and putting them next to the first few seconds of *Ashbah*, we see the composer operating in two very different stylistic modes. *Ashbah* begins with the ominous combined sounds of a widely spaced piano chord, a flute playing with an extended technique where the keys are slapped rather than depressed, a tam-tam, a pizzicato cello glissando, and the violin and viola playing wispy, mysterious gestures. *Losses*, on the other hand, starts with three rich chords which wouldn't be out of place in the context of jazz, and whose orchestration is deliciously American.

The composer writes:

"The voice part of [Ives's] *In Flanders Fields* consists of phrases whose notes are fragments of various patriotic songs (in addition to the *Marseillaise*), and I decided I wanted the voice part of my setting of the Melville to be cobbled together from phrases of several Civil War songs (*The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom, Columbia the Gem of the Ocean, Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Ground, The Bonnie Blue Flag, and Dixie*), whose notes, manipulated in various ways, would then become the source of the settings of the rest of the poems."

As in the other works on this recording, borrowed tunes are malleable and flexible, but in this piece, they can turn on a dime into something violent and alarming. In *Faith-Based Initiative*, the melodies represent a sense of home, from which we depart and to which we return, whereas in *Friendly Fire*, the juxtaposition is more jagged and appropriately bellicose.

This collection of pieces offers a portrait of a composer whose music is carefully planned out: the emotional "program" of the pre-composition (which is to say, the choice of texts, the overall structure of the piece) is thoughtful and often extra-musical. A thought about grief and mourning, when left to marinate, turns into a catalogue of variations for solo viola. The shocking behavior of the Bush administration is somehow transformed into an arch-structure depicting a personal journey of faith and musical integration. A thought about wars both centuries ago and at the present time leads to a thoughtful survey of texts, which, when combined, create a chilling and disarmingly direct meditation on war.

Rodney's music is, in many ways, about the past haunting the present. It occupies a specific and poetic liminal space, in which a remembered tune can butt up against a modernist texture, or a gentle chord, with slightly different lighting, can take on an ominous shading. This tension between the familiar and the new is, I feel, a powerful way to listen through this collection, as well as the joy of listening for the pleasure of the composer's craft.



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[i] Barber, D. (2010, November 11). "For the Union Dead": Robert Lowell's Canonical Poem Turns 50. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/11/for-the-union-dead-robert-lowells-canonical-poem-turns-50/66263/

*(L-R): Ben Rouse, Frank Cunningham, Hyeyung Yoon,*
*Gregory Beaver, Rodney Lister, Rebecca Fischer & Jonah Sirota*

*Taking a breather at the recording sessions*

# Composer and Performers

**Rodney Lister** has received commissions, grants, and fellowships from the Berkshire Music Center, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation at the Library of Congress, the Fires of London, the Poets' Theatre, the Virgil Thomson Foundation, the Preparatory School of the New England Conservatory, Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble, the Master Singers, the International Barbara Pymm Society, the MacDowell Colony, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, among others. He was co-founder and do-director of Music Here & Now, a concert series of new music by Boston area composers at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1971-1973), and from 1976 until 1982 was music coordinator of Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble. The great American composer Milton Babbitt wrote, "Rodney Lister's achievements as composer, pianist, and conductor are of the greatest interest to those of us who take music as seriously as he does."

Rodney Lister's works have been performed by Joel Smirnoff, Tammy Grimes, Phyllis Curtin, Jane Manning, Mary Thomse, Michael Finnissy, Kathleen Supové, Jonah Sirota, Rebecca Fischer, Boston Cecelia, the Blair and Chiara Quartets, Collage New Music, and the Fires of London, among others, at Tanglewood, the Library of Congress, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and in New York and London, among other places. As a pianist, he has been involved in premieres, first US performances, first UK performances, or first Boston performances of works by Virgil Thomson, Peter Maxwell Davies, Milton Babbitt, Michael Finnissy, Philip Grange, Lee Hyla, and Paul Bowles, among others. He is currently on the faculties of the Boston University School of Music, where he teaches composition and theory and is the director of Time's Arrow, the new music ensemble of the School of Music, and the Preparatory School of the New England Conservatory, where he teaches composition, piano, theory, and chamber music and is the director of the school's annual festival of new music. He is also a music tutor at Pforzheimer House, Harvard University, and is on the faculty of Greenwood Music Camp. His articles and reviews have appeared in The Grove Dictionary of American Music, Tempo, Sequenza21, American Music, and the Paris New Music Review.

Rodney Lister received his early musical training at the Blair School of Music in Nashville, Tennessee. He was a student at the New England Conservatory of Music (Bachelor of Music degree, with honors) from 1969 to 1973 and at Brandeis University (Master of Fine Arts degree) from 1973 to 1977, and from which he received a doctorate in 2000. He studied privately with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and was a member of Davies's' composition seminar at the Dartington Hall Summer School of Music (1975, 1978, 1980-82). He was a Bernstein fellow at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood in 1973. His composition teachers, aside from Davies, have been Malcolm Peyton, Donald Martino, Harold Shapero, Arthur Berger, and Virgil Thomson. He also studied piano with Enid Katahn, David Hagan, Robert Helps, and Patricia Zander.

The **Chiara String Quartet** (Rebecca Fischer and Hyeyung Yoon, violins; Jonah Sirota, viola; Gregory Beaver, cello) was known throughout its eighteen-year tenure as a group that engaged with music at its core. From 2000-2018 the quartet dedicated itself to making the musical experience meaningful for all involved, from playing in venues like major concert halls to clubs, creating interactive programs for all ages, and performing and recording from memory, or “by heart.” Described by an audience member as “a 3-D experience for the listener,” playing by heart was deeply rewarding for the Chiaras; memorizing the score helped the quartet to closely relate to the composer’s compositional process as well as become more vulnerable onstage. The Chiara’s “highly virtuosic, edge-of-the-seat playing” (The Boston Globe) garnered them awards on three continents, as well as long term residencies at Harvard University, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the University of Nebraska, and Greenwood Music Camp. They collaborated with artists such as Simone Dinnerstein, Roger Tapping, the Juilliard and Saint Lawrence Quartets, and the electronic group Matmos, as well as commissioning and premiering many new works. Their recordings of string quartets by Béla Bartók, Gabriela Lena Frank, Johannes Brahms, Robert Sirota and Jefferson Friedman, among others, capture the Chiara’s uniquely vibrant sound and purpose.

Charles Blandy has been praised as “a versatile tenor with agility, endless breath, and vigorous high notes" (Goldberg); “breathtaking” (Boston Globe); “fearless” (New York Times).

He was Evangelist in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* with Emmanuel Music, and appears in their Bach Cantata series; in *Bach’s B minor Mass* with Orchestra Iowa; and the American Classical Orchestra (NYC). He has sung Handel’s *Messiah* with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Portland Baroque Orchestra and American Bach Soloists. With Emmanuel Music he performed in John Harbison’s *The Great Gatsby*; Stravinsky’s *Rake’s Progress,* and Mozart’s *Abduction from the Seraglio*. Other appearances include: Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music, Boston Early Music Festival, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Handel and Haydn Society, Exsultemus, and the Charlotte Symphony.

Charles studied at Tanglewood, Indiana University, and Oberlin College. He is originally from Troy NY. **charlesblandy.com**

Violist and composer Jonah Sirota is a new breed of multi-talented musician. Equally at home scoring and recording music for TV, film, and video games, writing concert music, and performing as a soloist and chamber musician, Jonah creates and recreates vivid music for a wide variety of audiences. He has performed or arranged music for numerous projects including the 2021 Oscar-nominated animated short If Anything Happens I Love You…, the 2021 Sundance film Wild Hearts, and major cinematic releases from Mulan to the Mandalorian. His recent EP Storylander brings his unique string voice to life in cinematic cues made for visual media. Recent concert compositions include Entangled—a flute and viola d’amore duo for Christina Jennings and Matthew Dane, and the string quartet Socially Distant, commissioned by the Hartt School of Music. Jonah also performs with several chamber ensembles, including Project: California String Quartet, and was the founding violist of the Chiara String Quartet. **www.jonahsirota.com**

**Collage New Music is** a leader among adventurous ensembles that nurture that vital intersection of composer, performer and listener. The ensemble's repertoire is both wide and deep, ranging from classical Twentieth-Century works, to extraordinary less-known compositions, and to many brand-new creations by American composers. Its diverse programs include solo repertoire, music for varying sized ensembles, theatrical works, fully-staged chamber operas, and music with electronics. Collage champions both young and established composers, and it has become a passionate advocate for the music of Donald Sur, John Harbison, Andrew Imbrie, Charles Fussell, Fred Lerdahl, John Heiss, Stephen Hartke, and many other American composers. The ensemble appears on the New World, Koch, and Albany labels. Its recording of Harbison's Mottetti di Montale, conducted by David Hoose, was a 2005 Grammy Nominee for Best Performance by a Small Ensemble. In the 2022-2023 season, Collage will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary.
**http://www.collagenewmusic.org/**

**David Hoose** has been Music Director of Collage New Music for thirty-two years. He had a long Professorial engagement at Boston University, where he was the School of Music Director of Orchestras and taught orchestral conducting for twenty-nine years, and is Music Director Emeritus of Cantata Singers & Ensemble, which he led for thirty-eight seasons. For eleven years, he also served as Music Director of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Hoose is winner of the Czech Republic's Silver Jan Masaryk Honorary Medal, the Ditson Conductors Award for the Advancement of American Music, the Choral Arts New England Lifetime Achievement Award, and the ASCAP/Chorus America Award for Adventurous Programming. His recording with Collage New Music of John Harbison's Mottetti di Montale was a Grammy Nominee for "Best Recording with Small Ensemble, With or Without Conductor." With the Emmanuel Wind Quintet, of which he was the hornist, he was winner of the 1981 Walter W. Naumburg Award for Chamber Music. David Hoose has appeared as guest conductor with the

National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Korean Broadcasting Symphony, Orchestra Regionale Toscana, St. Louis Symphony, Utah Symphony, Chicago Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Chamber Players, Quad Cities Symphony Orchestra, Symphony New Hampshire, and Handel & Haydn Society. In Boston, he has conducted Emmanuel Music (numerous times), Fromm Chamber Players, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra (numerous times), Lexington Symphony, Dinosaur Annex, and Alea III. He has also appeared as guest conductor at the Tanglewood, Monadnock, Warebrook, and New Hampshire music festivals.

*Richard Cornell, Rodney Lister & Charles Blandy*

# Friendly Fire - texts

**Ode to the Confederate Dead**
Row after row with strict impunity
The headstones yield their names to the element,
The wind whirrs without recollection;
In the riven troughs the splayed leaves
Pile up, of nature the casual sacrament
To the seasonal eternity of death;
Then driven by the fierce scrutiny
Of heaven to their election in the vast breath,
They sough the rumor of mortality.

Autumn is desolation in the plot
Of a thousand acres where the memories grow
From the inexhaustible bodies that are not
Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row.
Think of the autumns that have come and gone!
Ambitious November with the humors of the year,
With a particular zeal for every slab,
Staining the uncomfortable angels that rot
On the slabs, a wing chipped here, an arm there:
The brute curiosity of an angel's stare
Turns you, like them, to stone,
Transforms the heaving air
Till plunged to a heavier world below
You shift your sea-space blindly
Heaving, turning like the blind crab.

Dazed by the wind, only the wind
The leaves flying, plunge

You know who have waited by the wall
The twilight certainty of an animal,
Those midnight restitutions of the blood
You know–the immitigable pines, the smoky frieze
Of the sky, the sudden call: you know the rage,
The cold pool left by the mounting flood,
Of muted Zeno and Parmenides.
You who have waited for the angry resolution
Of those desires that should be yours tomorrow,
You know the unimportant shrift of death
And praise the vision
And praise the arrogant circumstance
Of those who fall
Rank upon rank, hurried, beyond decision–
Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.

Seeing, seeing only the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
Demons out of the earth–they will not last.
Stonewall, Stonewall, and the sunken fields of hemp,
Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.
Lost in that orient of the thick and fast
You will curse the setting sun.

Cursing only the leaves crying
Like an old man in a storm

You hear the shout, the crazy hemlocks point
With troubled fingers to the silence which
Smothers you, a mummy, in time.
The hound bitch
Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar
Hears the wind only.

Now that the salt of their blood
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,
Seals the malignant purity of the flood,
What shall we who count our days and bow

Our heads with a commemorial woe
In the ribboned coats of grim felicity,
What shall we say of the bones, unclean,
Whose verdurous anonymity will grow?

The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes
Lost in these acres of the insane green?
The gray lean spiders come, they come and go;
In a tangle of willows without light
The singular screech-owl's tight
Invisible lyric seeds the mind
With the furious murmur of their chivalry.

We shall say only the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

We shall say only the leaves whispering
In the improbable mist of nightfall
That flies on multiple wing:
Night is the beginning and the end
And in between the ends of distraction
Waits mute speculation, the patient curse
That stones the eyes, or like the jaguar leaps
For his own image in a jungle pool, his victim.

What shall we say who have knowledge
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave
In the house? The ravenous grave?

Leave now
The shut gate and the decomposing wall:
The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,
Riots with his tongue through the hush–
Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!

***Allen Tate***

**The Fury of Aerial Bombardment**

You would think the fury of aerial bombardment
Would rouse God to relent; the infinite spaces
Are still silent. He looks on shock-pried faces.
History, even, does not know what is meant.
You would feel that after so many centuries
God would give man to repent; yet he can kill
As Cain could, but with multitudinous will,
No farther advanced than in his ancient furies.
Was man made stupid to see his own stupidity?
Is God by definition indifferent, beyond us all?
Is the eternal truth man's fighting soul
Wherein the Beast ravens in its own avidity?
Of Van Wettering I speak, and Averill,
Names on a list, whose faces I do not recall
But they are gone to early death, who late in school
Distinguished the belt feed lever from the belt holding pawl.

***Richard Eberhart***

**Women, Children, Babies, Cows, Cats**

"It was at My Lai or Sonmy or something,
it was this afternoon....We had these orders,
we had all night to think about it—
we was to burn and kill, then there'd be nothing
standing, women, children, babies, cows, cats...
As soon as we hopped the choppers, we started
shooting.
I remember...as we was coming up upon one area
in Pinkville, a man with a gun...running—this lady...
Lieutenant La Guerre said, 'Shoot here.' I said,
'You shoot her, I don't want to shoot no lady,'
She had one foot in the door...When I turned her,
there was this little one-month-year-old baby
I thought it was her gun. It kind of cracked me up."

***Robert Lowell***

**Losses**
It was not dying: everybody died.
It was not dying: we had died before
In the routine crashes–and our fields
Called up the papers, wrote home to our folks,
And the rates rose, all because of us.

We died on the wrong page of the almanac,
Scattered on mountains fifty miles away;
Diving on haystacks, fighting with a friend,
We blazed up on the lines we never saw.
We died like aunts or pets or foreigners.
(When we left high school nothing else had died
For us to figure we had died like.)

In our new planes, with our new crews, we bombed
The ranges by the desert or the shore,
Fired at towed targets, waited for our scores–
And turned into replacements and woke up
One morning, over England, operational.
It wasn't different: but if we died
It was not an accident but a mistake
(But an easy one for anyone to make).

We read our mail and counted up our missions–
In bombers named for girls, we burned
The cities we had learned about in school–
Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among
The people we had killed and never seen.
When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
When we died they said, "Our casualties were low."
They said, "Here are the maps"; we burned the cities.
It was not dying–no, not ever dying;
But the night I died I dreamed that I was dead,
And the cities said to me: "Why are you dying?
We are satisfied, if you are; but why did I die?"

***Randall Jarrell***

**The March into Virginia**
*Ending in the First Manassas (July, 1861)*
Did all the lets and bars appear
To every just or larger end,
When should come the trust and cheer?
Youth must its ignorant impulse lend–
Age find place in the rear.
All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys,
The champions and enthusiasts of the state:
Turbid ardours and vain joys
Not barrenly abate—
Stimulants to the power mature,
Preparatives of fate.

Who here forecasteth the event?
What heart but spurns at precedent
And warnings of the wise,
Contemned foreclosures of surprise?
The banners play, the bugles call,
The air is blue and prodigal.
No berrying party, pleasure–wooed,
No picnic party in the May,
Ever went less loth than they
Into that leafy neighbourhood.
In Bacchic glee they file toward Fate,
Moloch's uninitiate;
Expectancy, and glad surmise
Of battle's unknown mysteries.

All they feel is this: 'tis glory,
A rapture sharp, through transitory,
Yet lasting in the belaureled story.
So they gaily go to fight,
Chatting left and laughing right.

But some who this blithe mood present,
As on in lightsome files they fare,
Shall die experienced ere three days are spent—
Perish, enlightened by the volleyed glare;
Or shame survive, and, like to adamant,
The throe of Second Manassas share.

***Herman Melville***

**The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner**

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the night mare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

***Randall Jarrell***

**Ashbah**

The ghosts of American soldiers
wander the streets of Balad by night,
unsure of their way home, exhausted,
the desert wind blowing trash
down the narrow alleys as a voice
sounds from the minaret, a soulful call
reminding them how alone they are,
how lost. And the Iraqi dead,
they watch in silence from rooftops
as date palms line the shore in silhouette,
leaning toward Mecca when the dawn wind blows.

***Brian Turner***

**A Box Comes Home**

I remember the United State of America
As a flag-draped box with Arthur in it
and six marines to bear it one their shoulders.

I wonder how someone once came to remember
The Empire of the East and the Empire of the West.
As an urn maybe delivered by chariot.

You could bring Germany back on a shield once
And France in a plume. England, I suppose,
Kept coming back a long time as a letter.

Once I saw Arthur dressed as the United States
Of America. Now I see the United States
Of America as Arthur in a flag-sealed domino.

And I would pray more good of Arthur
Than I can wholly believe. I would pray
An agreement with the United States of America

To equal Arthur's living as it equals his dying
At the red-taped grave in Woodmere
By the rain and oak leaves on the domino.

***John Ciardi***

**The Certainty**

They have refined the means of destruction,
abstract science almost visibly shining,
it is so highly polished. Immaterial weapons
no one could ever hold in their hands
streak across darkness, across great distances,
threading through mazes to arrive
at targets that are concepts—

But one ancient certainty
remains: war
means blood, spilling from living bodies,
means severed limbs, blindness, terror,
means grief, agony, orphans, starvation,
prolonged misery, prolonged resentment and hatred
and guilt,
means all of these multiplied, multiplied,
means death, death, death, and death.

***Denise Levertov***

**For the Union Dead**

*"Relinquunt Omnia Servare Rem Publicam."*
The old South Boston Aquarium stands
in a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are
boarded.
The bronze weathervane cod has lost half its scales.
The airy tanks are dry.

Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass;
my hand tingled
to burst the bubbles
drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.

My hand draws back. I often sigh still
for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom
of the fish and reptile. One morning last March,
I pressed against the new barbed and galvanized
fence on the Boston Common. Behind their cage,
yellow dinosaur steamshovels were grunting
as they cropped up tons of mush and grass
to gouge their underworld garage.

Parking spaces luxuriate like civic
sandpiles in the heart of Boston.
A girdle of orange, Puritan-pumpkin colored girders
braces the tingling Statehouse,
shaking over the excavations, as it faces Colonel Shaw
and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry
on St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief,
propped by a plank splint against the garage's
earthquake.

Two months after marching through Boston,
half the regiment was dead;
at the dedication,
William James could almost hear the bronze Negroes
breathe.

Their monument sticks like a fishbone
in the city's throat.
Its Colonel is as lean
as a compass-needle.

He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
a greyhound's gentle tautness;
he seems to wince at pleasure,
and suffocate for privacy.

He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely
peculiar power to choose life and die—
when he leads his black soldiers to death,
he cannot bend his back.

On a thousand small New England greens,
the old white churches hold their air
of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier
grow slimmer and younger each year—
wasp-waisted, they doze over muskets
and muse through their sideburns...

Shaw's father wanted no monument
except the ditch,
where his son's body was thrown
and lost with his "niggers."

The ditch is nearer.
There are no statues for the last war here;
on Boylston Street, a commercial photograph
shows Hiroshima boiling

over a Mosler Safe, the "Rock of Ages"
that survived the blast. Space is nearer.

When I crouch to my television set,
the drained faces of Negro school-children rise like
balloons.

Colonel Shaw
is riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessed break.

The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease.

***Robert Lowell***

*The memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Beacon Street, Boston, MA, referred to in the poem.*

*Rodney Lister*

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