

REGISTER VII · LABOUR · THE FORGE-HALLS · ARCHIVE REF: HGU-MV

THE HUNGRY GODS UNIVERSE

MASSED VOICES

A Suite for the Two Choirs

A Performing Edition, with a Critical Apparatus



N. VAN SETERS & CLAUDE

PREPARED FOR THE INSTITUT D'HISTOIRE DE LA CONTINUITÉ

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after the account of the same name · Register VII, Labour

MASSSED VOICES

*“Two attendances, one man –
the only ears that hear it as anything but load.”*

– from the account

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Conductor's Preface

This is a performing edition of the suite *Massed Voices*, set for two choirs that never share a stage: a human choir of six, and a machine choir of ten thousand. The first is small, mortal, and audibly failing; the second is vast, tireless, and was never alive. The work is the distance between them, kept by one listener who attends both. The conductor's whole task is to refuse to close that distance.

One law governs the realisation. The machine choir must be beautiful — not menacing, not a dread to be survived, but the loveliest sound in the work. Its horror, if the word applies, is only that it can hold without effort the very note the human six break themselves reaching for. In the same measure, the human choir must be permitted to fail audibly: the waver, the short breath, the phrase that does not arrive are not blemishes to be polished but the substance of the singing. A secure, well-blended six falsifies the entire suite.

Breath is the work's hidden subject, and it runs the opposite way to nature's. The living voices breathe, and the listener should hear them breathe; the machine voice never breathes, and that seamlessness is its grief and its glory. Beneath everything sounds a sixty-three-hertz fundamental, felt before it is heard, present from the first bar and surfacing only at the drive: the suite sits inside the works from the beginning. And nothing in it cadences. There is no resolving chord, no swell offered as reward; the hall gathers the held note and hands back nothing. That refusal is not coldness. It is the only honest setting of what the work is about.

— for the Institut d'histoire de la continuité

A Note on the Texts

Three states of text. The human choir sings in three conditions. The oldest setting (Mvt 2, and returning in Mvt 11) survives only as worn vowels with a few Latin fragments surfacing; it is given here as reconstructed, the performing tradition having smoothed the words past recovery. The lament (Mvt 9) is in the common tongue and is given whole. The remaining vocal movements are wordless vocalise. The machine choir (Mvts 7, 8) has no text; it sounds the setting without words and without hearing.

The buried correspondence. The editor draws the performer's attention to one matter above all. The Latin the human choir can no longer fully sing — *the voice that does not fail, held until the house falls* — is an exact description of the machine choir that has replaced it. The fragment is planted in Mvt 2 and returns, fulfilled, in Mvt 11. It should be sounded both times without emphasis; the correspondence is for the listener to find, not for the performance to announce.

On realisation. The machine movements are not effects but voices, and should be built as such — the fundamental of Mvt 7 blooming into the overtone body of Mvt 8, one sound revealing what it always contained. The Latin texts are collected, with translations, at the back.

MASSED VOICES

PART ONE

THE HALL



The dying choir. Human breath. The four hundred empty seats.

1. Sixty

Six voices, wordless · a cappella · c. 4'30"

The suite opens at its most depleted: six singers on risers built for sixty. The first movement is not an introduction but a measurement — the choir sounding, before anything else, the size of its own absence. What the listener should register is not a small choir but a large one almost entirely gone.

TEXT

Wordless. Open vowels; a unison the missing voices should be filling.

PERFORMANCE

Begin without gesture. Six voices, no doubling, no reverb to stand in for the absent fifty-four; the absence must be audible. Breath kept in. No crescendo, no swell into the next movement.



2. The Old Setting

Six voices, vocalise with surfacing Latin · faint drone · c. 6'30"

The central human movement. The choir attempts a setting written for sixty; over decades of performance the words have worn to vowels, and only fragments now surface. Those fragments — they hold the voice; it does not fail; until the house falls — describe a voice that does not fail, sustained until the building falls. This is precisely what the six cannot do, and what the machine choir of Movement 8 can. The reaching that does not arrive is the music; it is not a flaw in the performance to be corrected.

TEXT

tenent vocem — they hold the voice

non deficit — it does not fail

donec cadat domus — until the house falls

— the remainder worn to open vowels: ah, oh, oo —

PERFORMANCE

Do not arrive. The choir leans its whole weight toward a sound it cannot raise; keep the leaning audible. Rubato; a breath taken before each long phrase, as before lifting something too heavy. The phrase ends unreached.



3. The High Line Alone

Solo soprano, wordless · a thread of drone · c. 4'00"

The high line, written for four voices, now carried by one — the younger of the two sisters, since the others stopped coming. A breath taken before a phrase too heavy for a single throat; the lift; the waver; the hold that barely holds.

TEXT

Wordless. One surfacing fragment:

vocem solam — the voice alone

PERFORMANCE

Keep the waver. The note must almost not hold; a clean, secure sustain falsifies the movement. It ends into silence, not into reverb. Give the held note no swell.



4. What the Hall Gives Back

Choir tacet · room tone, faint choral tail · c. 3'30"

The movement of the silence after. A room built to gather sound and return it amplified returns, tonight, nothing: no applause, for there is no one; no resonance worth the name; only the four hundred empty seats and the size of what is missing. The note of the preceding movement is permitted to decay and is answered by the room with nothing.

TEXT

Effectively tacet. The decay of Movement 3; room tone; the small dry human sounds of an almost-empty hall.

PERFORMANCE

The anti-cadence of the work. The held note receives no return. Mostly silence; the conductor's task is to resist filling it. Nothing resolves.



5. A Vigil Is Not a Supervision

Six voices receding · footsteps, a door · c. 3'00"

The single witness leaves before the end, so that the last thing the six of them do, they do unobserved — a dignity he can give them only by his absence, by leaving while they still believe he is there. The music continues as the listener is taken out of the room.

TEXT

Wordless, receding. A door between the listener and the choir; cold air; the hall gone.

PERFORMANCE

Fade by distance, not by volume — a door closing between us and the sound, not a fader pulled down. Exit mid-phrase. The choir does not conclude; it is simply no longer heard.



THEHINGE



6. Radio Off

Instrumental · road, cold · 63 Hz surfacing · c. 4'30"

The drive from the hall at the centre of the old town to the works at its edge, past the ring road and the last houses, out to where the land was cheap and the cold latitude does half the cooling for free. The sixty-three-hertz fundamental that has lain beneath the whole suite begins, here, to surface. It is the emptiest span of the work: one choir behind us, the other not yet arrived.

TEXT

No voices. Road and wind; the last houses; a 63 Hz pressure rising from below the threshold of hearing.

PERFORMANCE

No melody, no event. Let it be empty. The loneliness of the hinge is the content; do not score it for comfort.



PART TWO

THE WORKS



The tireless choir. No breath. The one sound that never ends.

7. Sixty-Three Hertz

Instrumental drone · sub-bass fundamental · c. 5'00"

The fundamental, fully sounded: the pressure under everything, below the place hearing starts and above the place the body stops noticing, the sound the listener — like the man — has been inside all along without once hearing it. This is arrival, not threat; recognition, almost relief.

TEXT

No voices. The 63 Hz fundamental, filling the field; the first faint overtone shimmer that will become the choir of Movement 8.

PERFORMANCE

Not ominous. Warm, enveloping, almost holy. No swells, no events, no dread.
The body recognising a sound it has always been inside.



8. Ten Thousand

Synthetic choir, summed tones · no breath · c. 7'00"

The machine choir entire: ten thousand fans at ten thousand pitches that sum, the way voices sum, into one body of sound that stands up in the building and never has to take a breath. It raises, effortlessly and wordlessly, the setting the six could not (Movement 2); it cannot hear that it is singing, and would sing it to an empty building exactly as it sings it to the one man who hears it. The centre of gravity of the work.

TEXT

Wordless. The body of sound the sixty used to raise, raised now by a thing that was never alive. The vowels of Movement 2, made seamless and breathless.

PERFORMANCE

Make it beautiful. The grief of the whole suite is that this is beautiful; if it is not lovely, the work has failed. No breath anywhere, no waver, no resolution. Realise from the fundamental of Movement 7 — the 63 Hz blooming into its overtone body — not as a new event but as the same sound revealing what it contained.



9. The Water That Does Not Come Back

Small choir, English text · over machine drone · c. 5'00"

The suite's one outward movement, and its only words in the common tongue: the cost. The water drawn and not returned; the houses emptied past the ring road while the works filled; the young gone to the coast city, where the risers are still full because the work is there now — humming here, in the cold air it was built to use. A lament that names the loss without prosecuting the works, which are not a villain but a weather.

TEXT

The water goes in. The water does not come back.

The houses past the ring road emptied while the works filled.

The young went to the coast city, where the risers still fill.

The work is here now. The hum is here.

What was fed is not fed again. What was held is not held.

The air it was built to use is cold.

PERFORMANCE

Spare and declarative; no rising anger, no rhyme-jingle. The machine drone continues beneath and does not yield to the lament. State the loss; do not indict. Unresolved.



10. Two Attendances, One Man

Human choir over machine drone · a low line · c. 6'00"

The only movement in which both choirs sound at once: the failing human six (breathing) laid over the tireless machine body (breathless), held in suspension, neither permitted to win. Between them stands the one man who keeps both vigils — the going and the staying, the leaving-before-the-end and the standing-in-the-aisle — and who loves them both, the dying one and the one that is eating it, and can say so to no one.

TEXT

one is six people failing to raise a body —
 one is a body that cannot fail and was never alive —
 (he loves them both, and can say so to no one)

PERFORMANCE

Neither choir wins. The voices must not be drowned by the drone; the drone must not soften or resolve to accommodate the voices. The three lines are spoken low, half-buried, said once. If they read as narration, bury them deeper.



11. Until the Building Comes Down

Human choir to tacet · machine drone continuing · c. 6'30"

The close. The human note ends; the machine note does not. The eroded Latin of Movement 2 returns — until the house falls — now true not of the choir that once sang it but of the thing that replaced it, which will in fact hold the note until the building comes down. The man goes down the cold aisle into the one sound that never ends, carrying the other.

TEXT

they hold the note they will hold until the building comes down

—

six people, across the town, leaning the last of themselves
against the door —

he goes down the cold aisle into the one sound that never ends,
carrying the other.

donec cadat domus — *until the house falls*

PERFORMANCE

It cannot cadence. The voices stop; the drone continues past the end of the movement and is faded while still sounding, never resolved. The last sound of the suite is the 63 Hz that lay beneath its first.



APPARATUS

Glossary, the Latin Texts, and
Colophon

A Glossary of the Forge-Hall Lexicon

the works

The data halls at the edge of the town; the home of the machine choir.
Never named more grandly by the man who walks them.

the forge-halls

The same, in the wider corpus: aquifer water in, heat out, a continuous load, sited at a cold latitude that does half the cooling for free.

the racks

The rows the man walks between on the night shift; the source of the massed sound.

the night walk

The reading of the room that no instrument does as well as a man who has done it eleven years.

the 63 Hz / the fundamental

The pressure beneath the whole suite, “below the place hearing starts and above the place the body stops noticing.” The work’s spine.

the body of sound

The summed tone of ten thousand fans — “it does not reach for the body of the sound; it is the body of the sound.”

the massed voices

Both choirs at once: the dying human and the tireless machine. The title holds them together.

the risers

The choir stand, built for sixty, holding six. In the coast city the risers are still full.

the old setting

The work the human choir attempts and cannot raise; its text worn to vowels over sixty years of Thursdays.

the water that does not come back

The aquifer drawn by the works and not returned; the figure for everything the works consume that does not return, the town included.

the ring road

The edge past which the houses emptied while the works filled.

the coast city

Where the young went, where the work is now, where the choirs still
have their sixty.

the vigil

What the man keeps, twice on a Thursday: for the dying choir in a hall
nobody enters, and for the tireless one in a hall nobody may enter.

The Latin Texts

Given as reconstructed; the performing tradition had worn the words past certain recovery.

tenent vocem — *they hold the voice*

Third person plural; the subject is unstated — in the old setting, the singers; in the event, the fans.

non deficit — *it does not fail / does not fall short*

Of the voice, or of the one who holds it. The machine choir is the first to make the line literally true.

vocem solam — *the voice alone*

Mvt 3; the high line carried by one where there were four.

donec cadat domus — *until the house falls*

Mvt 2, returning in Mvt 11. *domus* is the house, the household, the building. The fans will hold the note until the building comes down.



Concentration over consolation.

— the standing discipline of the canon

A recovered holding of the Institut d'histoire de la continuité.

Pièce récupérée · Recovered · Acc. HGU-MV.