Revival of Tan Dun’s Water Passion  
Saturday, April 3, 2021 | 7:30 pm

Water Passion After St. Matthew
Tan Dun

Part I
I. Baptism
II. Temptations
III. Last Supper
IV. In the Garden of Gethsemane

Part II
V. Stone Song
VI. Give Us Barabbas!
VII. Death and Earthquake
VIII. Water and Resurrection

Sarah Ioannides, conductor
Symphony Tacoma Voices
(Geoffrey Boers, director)

Elizabeth Keusch, soprano
Gary Sorenson, bass
Svend Rønning, violin
Kevin Krentz, cello
Amy Boers, sampler

Water Percussionists:
David Cossin, solo percussion
Denali Williams, second percussion
Matt Drumm, third percussion

Encore video produced by Sarah Ioannides and Karina Bhaner.
PART I

I. BAPTISM
Chorus:
a sound is heard in water,
in darkness,
the tears
are crying for rebirth....

John (Bass):
I baptize you with water for
repentance,
but the one after me will baptize you
with Holy Spirit and fire.

Chorus:
someone is shouting in the desert,
prepare a road,
for him to go!

John (Bass):
I ought to be baptized by you,
why do you come to me?

Soprano:
tell us,
are you the one John said was going
to come,

Soprano & Bass:
or should we expect someone else?

Chorus:
then heaven was opened,
the Spirit coming down like a dove.
and a voice said: Son -

Soprano:
this is my own beloved Son,
in whom I am well pleased.

II. TEMPTATIONS
Chorus:
desert!

Devil (Soprano):
if you are the son of God,
turn those stones into bread.

Jesus (Bass):
man cannot live on bread alone,
but needs every word that God
speaks.

Chorus:
river!

Devil (Soprano):
do not put the Lord your God to
the test.

Chorus:
mountain!

Devil (Soprano):
if you kneel down and worship me,
all this I give you.

Jesus (Bass):
go away!
worship the Lord your god and serve
only Him!

Chorus:
fine!

Bass & Soprano:
the devil left; the angels came.

III: LAST SUPPER
Chorus:
a sound is heard in water,
in darkness
the tears
are crying for truth....

Jesus (Bass):
eat,
drink,
I wish to eat this meal with you,
before I suffer.

for truly I say unto you,
i will not eat again
until that day when it becomes true
in the kingdom of God.

for truly I say to you,
one of you will betray me,
who is eating with me now.

Chorus:
Is it I? - is it I? - is it I?

Judas (Soprano):
master, is it I?

Jesus (Bass):
you have said it.

Peter (Soprano):
I will go with you,
even to death.

Jesus (Bass):
truly I say to you that on this very night,
before the cock crows,
you will deny me three times.

Chorus:
is it I? - is it I? - is it I?

Jesus (Bass):
truly I say to you
the Son of Man will soon be
mocked,
whipped,
and crucified,
but in three days,
he will be raised to life.

Chorus:
he broke the bread -

Jesus (Bass):
drink, it is my blood...

IV. IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE
Soprano:
trees
want to rest
wind
never stops

Chorus:
wu...wu...wu...
Eli Eli Lamala

Soprano:
in the Garden of Gethsemane
Jesus said to his disciples:
Soprano & Bass: let me pray

Jesus (Bass): sorrow, bitter sorrow, take this cup of suffering from me!

Soprano: he returned to disciples and found them asleep.

Jesus (Bass): the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Soprano: the disciples still slept.

Jesus (Bass): wake up!

Soprano: Judas arrived with a large crowd with swords.

Soprano & Chorus: the man I kiss is the one you want.

Soprano: Judas went straight to Jesus and said to him:

Soprano & Chorus: Teacher, may peace be with you.

Chorus: Eli Eli Lamala...arrest him!

Jesus (Bass): all those who take up the sword will die by the sword.

Chorus: Eli Eli Lamala.... arrest him!

Soprano: then all the disciples left Jesus and fled.

Chorus: Eli Eli Lamala arrest him!

Soprano: do you now know what he said to you: "before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

Chorus: no!

Judas (Bass): I have also sinned. I have betrayed the innocent blood. here are the thirty pieces of silver, for which I killed him, for which I must die.

Chorus: no!

Soprano: you must be one of them, your accent gives you away.

Peter (Bass): I swear that I don’t know what you mean.

Chorus: no!

Soprano: you were with Jesus Nazareth.

Chorus: no!

Peter (Bass): I swear that I don’t know what you mean.

Chorus: no!

Peter (Bass): no! (a cock crows from orchestra)

Chorus: no!

Soprano: you - ha, ha, prophesize for us, Messiah! if you are the son of God, tell us who hits, who spits, who slaps you now!

Chorus: you - ha, ha, the king of the Jews! if you come down off the cross, we will believe!

Soprano: he can tear down the temple, and build it up again in three days! blasphemy!
Pilate (Chorus):
which one do you want:
Barabbas the thief,
or Jesus called Messiah!

Chorus:
Messiah? Messiah? Messiah?
give us Barabbas!

Soprano:
are you the son of God?

Jesus (Bass):
you have said so.
for this I was born,
for this I came into the world,
to give witness to the truth.

Chorus:
killed him! kill him!

(Silence)

Eli Eli lamala
kill him! kill him!

Jesus (Bass):
Father, forgive them for they know not
what they do.

Chorus:
Eli Eli Lamala
kill him! kill him!

VII: DEATH AND EARTHQUAKE
Chorus:
wu...wu...wu...

Jesus (Bass):
Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?

Soprano:
my God, my God, why hast thou for-saken me?

Jesus (Bass):
I thirst...

Soprano:
they gave him vinegar...

Jesus (Bass):
it is finished...

(earthquake music)

VIII. WATER AND RESURRECTION
Chorus:
a sound is heard in water,
the sound of innocence,
in darkness
in three days
the everlasting waters
tears
are crying for rebirth...

Jesus (Bass), Chorus, Soprano:
come --
a time to love
a time of peace
a time to dance
a time of silence....

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In 2000, the International Bach Academy in Germany commissioned four composers to write new “passions” (choral musical settings of the Gospel texts) to mark the 250th anniversary of the death of Bach—whose own works in the passion genre have withstood the passing of centuries. Tan Dun, Grammy- and Oscar-winning composer of the score to the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, was among the chosen composers.

From a Chinese Buddhist heritage, he shared, “I was excited because it is such a powerful, dramatic, operatic story. And I thought, we are in a global village now, this very powerful story must be shared. I’m not fussy about language or culture; I’m fascinated by the ideas behind them.”

Water has long been used as a metaphor in music. But only the progressive Tan Dun has cast this ubiquitous yet precious substance as the starring instrument, inventing a new form of percussion in the process.

Tan Dun writes: “In my hometown, in ancient times and even in my childhood in the village, the people were always washing rice in the river before they cooked it, and washing their clothes in the river, washing their bodies in the river. I had the experience of living with the water, playing with the water, listening to the water. It was very important to me.

“When my wife was pregnant, we went to the doctor for an ultrasound, and there I could see this beautiful baby and hear the heart. Suddenly I heard this beautiful water sound and I realized: this is the sound all human beings hear first. At that time I had just gotten the commission for the Water Passion. I said, ’I’ve got to start with water’—it’s the beginning, and the beginning is the ending, and the end is the beginning. That’s the meaning of resurrection.”

Water is a sacred symbol of creation, death and rebirth in a multitude of cultures. With this, Tan Dun transcends and universalizes the traditional passion tale through the unpredictable conceptual and sensory juxtapositions which have become synonymous with his name. East meets West, tribal rituals meet electronica, symphony meets theater, and Buddhism meets Christianity.

The stage design is centered around seventeen large, transparent, illuminated water basins on pedestals forming the shape of a massive cross interspersed among the musicians. Throughout the 90-minute work, these installations are used as percussion instruments, glowing with colors to set the mood as the passion play progresses. Three percussionists make the water splash, gurgle, drip, boom, flow, bubble and hiss with their hands and all manner of other tools like spoons, tubes and plastic cups. Wooden salad bowls float as drums, sand is poured, and submerged gongs reverberate. The water percussion is juxtaposed with contrasting sonic textures, including Tibetan cymbals, chimes, xun (a traditional Chinese clay egg-shaped flute), and smooth beach rocks.

Dr. Geoffrey Boers’s magnificent chorus essentially becomes a “voice orchestra,” along with guest soprano Elizabeth Keusch and bass Gary Sorenson, guiding the audience through the story. As with his instrumentation, Tan Dun interweaves disparate world vocal styles and plays of timbres, from whispers to shrieks to monk-like chants and Broadway-style dialogue shouts.

Sarah Ioannides holds a unique key to the success of this production. From 1999-2003, she served as Tan Dun’s assistant conductor and production coordinator, regularly collaborating with him and performing Water Passion worldwide.
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