



STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900)

Libretto adapted by the composer
From the 'lines' of Stephen Crane:
The Black Riders and Other Lines (1895) & War is Kind (1899)

I

If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky;
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant —
What then?

II

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill of an All-Master
Made He the hull and the sails,
Held He the rudder
Ready for adjustment.
Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
Then — at fateful time — a wrong called,
And God turned, heeding.
Lo, the ship slipped slyly,
In noiseless travel down the ways.
Forever rudderless, it went upon the seas.
Ridiculous voyages.
Quaint progress.
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing.

III

In the night
Grey heavy clouds muffled the valleys,
And the peaks looked toward God alone.
"O Master that movest the wind with a finger,
Humble, idle, futile peaks are we.
Grant that we may run swiftly across the world
To huddle in worship at Thy feet."

In the morning

A noise of men at work came the clear blue miles,
And the little black cities were apparent.
"O Master that knowest the meaning of raindrops,
Humble, idle, futile peaks are we.
Give voice to us, we pray, O Lord,
That we may sing Thy goodness to the sun."

In the evening

The far valleys were sprinkled with tiny lights.
"O Master that knowest the value of kings and birds,
Thou hast made us humble, idle, futile peaks.
Thou only needest eternal patience;
We bow to Thy wisdom, O Lord --
Humble, idle, futile peaks."

In the night

Grey heavy clouds muffled the valleys,
And the peaks looked toward God alone.

IV

Two or three angels
Came near to the earth.
They saw a fat church.
Little black streams of people
Came and went in continually.
And the angels were puzzled
To know why the people went thus,
And why they stayed so long within.

V

There was a great cathedral.
To solemn songs,
A white procession
Moved toward the altar.
The chief man there
Bore himself proudly.
Yet some could see him cringe,
As in a place of danger,
Frightened glances into the air...
Threatening faces of the past...

VI

A slant of sun on dull brown walls,
A forgotten sky of bashful blue.

Toward God a mighty hymn,
A song of collisions and cries,
Rumbling wheels, hoof-beats, bells,
Welcomes, farewells, love-calls, final moans,
Voices of joy, idiocy, warning, despair,
The unknown appeals of brutes,
The chanting of flowers,
The screams of cut trees,
The senseless babble of hens and wise men --
A cluttered incoherency that says at the stars:
"O God, save us!"

VII

The silvered passing of a ship at night,
The sweep of each sad lost wave,
The dwindling boom of the steel thing's striving,
The little cry of a man to man,
A shadow falling across the greyer night,
And the sinking of the small star;
Then the waste, the far waste of waters,
And the soft lashing of black waves
For long and in loneliness.

Remember, thou, O ship of love,
Thou leavest a far waste of waters,
And the soft lashing of black waves
For long and in loneliness.

Remember, thou, O ship of love,
remember...

If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky;
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant —
What then?