

A Passion for the Planet

LIBRETTO

I CHORUS: Everything We Need

“At this very moment, the Earth is above you, the Earth is below you, all around you, and even inside you. The Earth is everywhere. The water in our flesh, the rock in our bones. We all are part of the Earth. We are part of the Earth and we carry her within us.”

(adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh’s Loveletter to the Earth, p. 8)

“Everything we need to live a good life is here on this planet. Everything we need is here on Mother Earth. She gives us all we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk. It gives us joy that she cares for us as she has since time began.”

(Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address)

Cry out with joy! Fill your heart with gladness! Bring forth a song of praise! Praise for the planet, gladness for its blessings, and joy in creation!

Alleluia!

II CHORUS: In the Briefest Moment of History

“One barrel of oil yields as much energy as twenty-five thousand hours of human manual labor—more than a decade of human labor per barrel.”

(Bill McKibben, Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet, p. 27)

“From 1850 to 1970, Americans increased their energy consumption 150-fold.”

(David Orr, Dangerous Years, p. 58)

“The average American uses twenty-five barrels each year, which is like finding three hundred years of free labor every year.”

(Bill McKibben, Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet, p. 27)

“And so, in the briefest moment of history, we came to believe that the miraculous and the extraordinary were merely normal.”

(David Orr, Dangerous Years, p. 3)

III CHORUS: The Three Gyres

“Fifteen-hundred miles west of Seattle, in the middle of the North Pacific, lurks a mass of plastic debris and chemical sludge known as the North Pacific Gyre. It is estimated to be the size of the lower forty-eight states. The exact size of the garbage gyre is not known. What is known is, it is massive and growing.”

"Six miles above our heads, another gyre, a gyre of gases, circulates the Earth. This gyre is the result of our annual combustion of four cubic miles of primeval goo, four cubic miles of coal and oil and natural gas. This atmospheric gyre is changing the Earth in an instant of geologic time and locking us into a future of extreme heat, drought, larger storms, and rising seas."

"A third gyre of long-lived chemicals cycles through our blood and is stored permanently in our fatty tissues. These chemicals are in our air, water, food, and toys. Babies are born "pre-polluted." The average body now contains more than two hundred chemicals that are thought or known to cause cancer and cell mutations and to disrupt the endocrine system."

"The three gyres were once thought to be evidence of prosperity. But a large part of our wealth is fraudulent. We are simply offloading the costs of pollution and environmental damage onto people living somewhere else or at some later time."

(adapted from David Orr's Dangerous Years, pp. 99-102)

IV BARITONE: A Gift

"I cannot say for certain whether my life is a gift or not, but even with its ups and downs it certainly feels like one. I cannot say for certain that the feeling of sea winds in my face is a gift, or the view from a ridgetop, or the delight of fireflies on a summer evening, or the smell of rain after a long hot drought. I cannot say for certain whether these things are gifts or not, but they give me pleasure and they feel like beneficence beyond any thoughts I can muster. I cannot say with cool scientific logic why such things should be passed on to my grandchildren. I can only say that I am very thankful that those who came before us protected what they did or were at least unable to damage more than they did."

(adapted from David Orr's Dangerous Years, p. 134)

V CHORUS: We Are Driving in a Car

"We are driving in a car with bad brakes, in a fog and headed for a cliff. We know for sure now that the cliff is out there, we just don't know exactly where it is. Prudence would suggest that we start putting on the brakes."

(adapted from John Holdren, as quoted in Thomas Friedman's Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—And How It Can Renew America, pp. 125-126)

VI SOPRANO & CHORUS: Why Should I Bear the Blame?

"But why should I bear the blame? Why should I be expected to rise above my times? Is it my doing that my times have been so shameful? Why should it be left to me to lift myself out of this pit of disgrace?"

"I want to rage against the men who have created these times. I want to accuse them of spoiling my life in the way that a rat or a cockroach spoils food without even eating it, simply by walking over it and sniffing it and performing its bodily functions on it."

"It is childish, I know, to point fingers and blame others. I want to redeem myself, but am full of confusion about how to do it..."

(adapted from J.M. Coetzee's Age of Iron pp. 116-117)

VII CHORUS: The Ice Caps Are Melting

"The ice caps are melting; the glaciers are thinning; the oceans are rising; the wildfires are raging; the species are dying."

(adapted from Bill McKibben's Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet, p. 45)

The way we are living cannot go on.

"Business as usual leads—directly and quickly—to catastrophe. Business as usual cannot go on, and what cannot go on, comes to an end."

(adapted from Alex Steffen's "The Last Decade and You",
<https://thenearlynow.com/the-last-decade-and-you-489a5375fbe8>)

Farmlands turn to desert, and families must flee.

"Too many people in a hot, poor, shrinking land. It's not hard to start a fight in a place like that. It's not hard to start a fight in a crowded, hot, shrinking land."

(Alex Perry, as quoted in Bill McKibben's Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet, p. 82)

Too hot. Too cold. Too wet. Too dry. Too much. Too little. Too late. Too soon.

"The sound of the rising tide—you cannot help hearing it."

(Thich Nhat Hanh, Loveletter to the Earth, p. 142)

VIII CHILDREN'S CHORUS, BARITONE, & CHORUS: The Question

"What have you done
with what was given you,
what have you done with
the blue, beautiful world?"

(Theo Dorgan, from "The Question")

"What have we done with the cold salt sea? Waters grow warmer and acid levels rise. And the plankton within, the plankton are dying; plankton on which all of life relies. What will fish eat? And what will we breathe when the plankton swarms are gone?"

(adapted from Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone's Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In without Going Crazy, p. 24)

“And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land will not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.”

(Leviticus XXVI: 19-20)

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla

(from the Requiem Mass)

*Day of wrath, that day
the world will dissolve in ashes*

IX CHORUS: Hope Is A Verb

Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up. Hope is patient. Hope is not passive. Hope is steady and competent and brave. Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up. Hope requires courage. Hope is practical. Hope is a discipline. Hope is not passive. Hope is patient. Hope requires skill. And hope is something we do. And with hope, we can create the gyres of positive change, and that change can redeem the earth.”

(adapted from David Orr’s Dangerous Years, p. 115)

**X SOPRANO, BARITONE, CHILDREN’S CHORUS, & CHORUS:
Nothing That Is Worth Doing**

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope; therefore we must be saved by love. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love; therefore we are saved by faith; therefore we shall be saved by hope.”

(adapted from Reinhold Niebuhr’s The Irony of American History)

**XI SOPRANO, BARITONE, CHILDREN’S CHORUS, CHORUS, & AUDIENCE:
Holy Earth, Ancient Home**

Holy earth, ancient home
Mother of us all,
You who grant us all we need,
All we need for eternity.
Holy earth, so vast and small.

Hear our prayer, hear our cry
Hear our song of praise.
Help us mend what has gone awry,
Gone awry with the web of life.
Help us learn your wiser ways.

Let us sing, all as one,
In the great human choir,
Blue-green world in a sea of stars,
A sea of stars that forever turns.
Holy earth in this holy gyre.
Holy earth, our one precious home. Amen.