

Blues Introit for Pentecost (2007)

SATB chorus, speaking chorus, and piano

Difficulty rating: 2+

Duration: 3'30"

Premiere: How!, St. Mary's Gospel Choir, Catherine Miller, piano, NYC, 06/19/07

My chamber chorus, How!, performed frequently at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, a progressive and activist church near the neighborhood of Harlem in Manhattan. The church's official choir, the St. Mary's Gospel Choir, and How! had split the bill on several concerts, and we decided it would be lovely to have a piece involving both ensembles for a Pentecost program we were planning.

I was immediately drawn to poet David Craig's tiny poem entitled "Pentecost" which, with a quick wink, suggests the ubiquitous presence of the Holy Ghost, right down to a simple plate of eggplant. The SATB chorus, How! in the premiere, sings the poem, in varied repeats, over a blues-inflected, syncopated rhythm in the piano. There are also hints of the fire and wind present in the Holy Ghost's visit to the Apostles as described in Acts 2. To give some sense of the glossolalia (speaking in tongues) that appears in this visit I have given 3 lines from Acts 2 to a separate speaking chorus, the Gospel Choir in the premiere. The words are spoken randomly, often simultaneously with the singing chorus, and give an impression of a babbling brook. The third player in the piece is a soloist, taken from the speaking chorus, who, at various intervals and with a blustering skeptical mock-righteousness, asks The Question ("Who is this Holy Spirit?"). My intention was for the piece to trace the concept of Presence through ideas, both musical and textual, that were sometimes serious, sometimes lighthearted.

Who is this Holy Spirit?

And what is He doing in the eggplant?

--David Craig

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,
and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon
each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other
tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

--Acts 2: 2-4