

## The Kallyope Yell (2008)

SSAATTBB, reciter, and percussion (2 players)

Difficulty rating: 5

Duration: 8'30"

Premiere: C4, conducted by Benjamin Niemczyk, with Daniel Neer (reciter), Levy Lorenzo & Dennis Sullivan (percussion), NYC, 06/07/08

This work was written for the occasion of C4's first official collaboration with instrumentalists. As an ensemble accustomed to almost exclusively a cappella work, this was a great opportunity for our composers. The text of *The Kallyope Yell* seems almost tailor-made for percussion. For balance considerations the work is best performed by a chorus of at least 24, and preferably even more.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931) was renowned for his brash, dramatic, almost evangelical public readings of his poetry. Despite his rural Illinois origins, his work celebrated modern life and is frequently populist in nature. He was also highly original in his use of pure sound in his poems. It's not surprising that he was not generally a favorite of the literary establishment of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A reporter once likened him to a circus calliope. Lindsay's response was to "take ownership" of the word and the result is The Kallyope Yell. Significantly, in Lindsay's identification with the inelegant instrument, he generally uses its alternate spelling, namely the one that rhymes with 'hope'.

Lindsay uses the circus as an allegory for the modern world in all its raucous, democratic beauty. Significantly for him, though, the circus also has an orderly flow of events. Indeed, while the lion may roar, he is nonetheless *tamed*. In my setting the percussion provides its characteristic clash and bang, but also a usually steady motoric pulse. The choral harmonies are advanced and often tonally ambiguous, yet they are "civilized" by their presentation in a theme and variations form known as a *chaconne*.

With Lindsay, the reciter's identification with the poet is even more pronounced. While the part is specifically rhythmicized, it leaves a high level of interpretation for the performer. For the most part the chorus' text is derived from the steam-powered sound world of the titular instrument: "Willy-willy-willy-wah-hoo, "sizz-fizz," "hoot-toot," "whoop-whoop." At a climax point in the work, however, half the chorus, won over by our preacher-ringmaster-poet, takes up the poem itself for the first part of the final stanza. The work soon closes with the orderly architecture of a rhythmic canon on Lindsay's "noise" words.

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[Loudly and rapidly with a leader, College yell fashion]

### I

Proud men  
Eternally  
Go about,  
Slander me,  
Call me the "Calliope."  
Sizz . . . . .  
Fizz . . . . .

### II

I am the Gutter Dream,  
Tune-maker, born of steam,  
Tooting joy, tooting hope.  
I am the Kallyope,  
Car called the Kallyope.  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
See the flags: snow-white tent,  
See the bear and elephant,  
See the monkey jump the rope,  
Listen to the Kallyope, Kallyope,  
Kallyope!  
Soul of the rhinoceros  
And the hippopotamus  
(Listen to the lion roar!)  
Jaguar, cockatoot,  
Loons, owls,  
Hoot, Hoot.  
Listen to the lion roar,  
Listen to the lion roar,  
Listen to the lion R-O-A-R!  
Hear the leopard cry for gore,  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Hail the bloody Indian band,  
Hail, all hail the popcorn stand,  
Hail to Barnum's picture there,  
People's idol everywhere,  
Whoop, whoop, whoop, **whoop!**  
Music of the mob am I,  
Circus day's tremendous cry: --  
I am the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope!  
Hoot toot, hoot toot, hoot toot, hoot  
toot,  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Sizz, fizz . . . . .

### III

Born of mobs, born of steam,  
Listen to my golden dream,  
Listen to my golden dream,  
Listen to my G-O-L-D-E-N D-R-E-A-M!  
Whoop whoop whoop whoop **WHOO!**  
I will blow the proud folk low,

Humanize the dour and slow,  
I will shake the proud folk down,  
(Listen to the lion roar!)  
Popcorn crowds shall rule the town --  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Steam shall work melodiously,  
Brotherhood increase.  
You'll see the world and all it holds  
For fifty cents apiece.  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Every day a circus day.  
*What?*  
Well, *almost* every day.  
Nevermore the sweater's den,  
Nevermore the prison pen.  
Gone the war on land and sea  
That aforesaid troubled men.  
Nations all in amity,  
Happy in their plumes arrayed  
In the long bright street parade.  
Bands a-playing every day.  
*What?*  
Well, *almost* every day.  
I am the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope!  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Hoot, toot, hoot, toot,  
Whoop whoop whoop whoop,  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Sizz, fizz . . . . .

### IV

Every soul  
Resident  
In the earth's one circus tent!  
Every man a trapeze king  
Then a pleased spectator there.  
On the benches! In the ring!  
While the neighbours gawk and stare  
And the cheering rolls along.  
Almost every day a race  
When the merry starting gong  
Rings, each chariot on the line,  
Every driver fit and fine  
With the steel-spring Roman grace.  
Almost every day a dream,  
Almost every day a dream.  
Every girl,  
Maid or wife,  
Wild with music,  
Eyes a-gleam  
With that marvel called desire:

Actress, princess, fit for life,  
Armed with honor like a knife,  
Jumping thro' the hoops of fire.  
(Listen to the lion roar!)  
Making all the children shout  
Clowns shall tumble all about,  
Painted high and full of song  
While the cheering rolls along,  
Tho' they scream,  
Tho' they rage,  
Every beast  
In his cage,  
Every beast  
In his den  
That aforetime troubled men.

V

I am the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope,  
Tooting hope, tooting hope, tooting hope,  
    tooting hope;  
Shaking window-pane and door  
With a crashing cosmic tune,  
With the war-cry of the spheres,  
Rhythm of the roar of noon,  
Rhythm of Niagara's roar,  
Voicing planet, star and moon,  
**Shrieking** of the better years.  
Prophet-singers will arise,  
Prophets coming after me,  
Sing my song in softer guise  
With more delicate surprise;  
I am but the pioneer  
Voice of the Democracy;  
I am the gutter-dream,  
I am the golden dream,  
Singing science, singing steam.  
I will blow the proud folk down,  
(Listen to the lion roar!)  
I am the Kallyope, Kallyope, Kallyope,  
Tooting hope, tooting hope, tooting hope,  
    tooting hope,  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Hoot toot, hoot toot, hoot toot, hoot  
    toot,  
Whoop whoop, whoop whoop,  
Whoop whoop, whoop whoop,  
Willy willy willy wah **hoo!**  
Sizz . . . . .  
Fizz . . . . .

--*Nicholas Vachel Lindsay*