

| now our grief is put away (2010)

for soprano and computer

Robert McClure

Program Notes

now our grief is put away uses the poem titled *Khao Lak Paradise Resort* by Anne Shaw in her book, *Undertow*. I found Anne after searching for poets I wanted to set for a different project. This poem leapt off the page with its vivid imagery and haunting descriptions of the tsunami that occurred on December 24, 2004 in the Southeast Pacific, which included Thailand, the setting for this poem. The tsunami killed between five and ten thousand people and devastated all that survived. The poem is filled with Anne's own description of her experience in the relief efforts, sayings from Thai culture, and descriptions from survivors of the tsunami. Shaw writes, "Thai culture allows a mourning period of 100 days, after which the soul of the departed - and the lives of the living - must move on," as a description for the line, *now our grief is put away*.

In setting the work, I did not want to try and take the audience to the places described but rather give them snapshots of moments or resurfacing memories they might have if they experienced this horrific event. The reader of the spoken text in the electronics is Anne Shaw who, kindly, lent her voice to this project.

Performance Notes

The written music approximates the timings as they line up with the electronics. I chose to leave the part loose to give freedom to the performer for maximum affective delivery of the text. Although, certain moments require precise synchronization. For this, learning the electronic part is crucial for the soprano.

Max/MSP Patch

1. To begin, download and install Max Runtime
2. Open `now_our_grief_is_put_away.maxpat`
3. Options menu, DSP Status, Audio On (Choose your input and output settings)
4. To turn the ADC and DAC on (to enable audio to run through the patch) hit the Tab key or manually click toggle boxes connected to `adc~` and `dac~`
5. To advance through the events use SPACEBAR
6. To stop recorded playback at any point hit DELETE

Khao lak paradise resort

Thailand, 2006

She scrubs the courtyard with a ragged broom
as red ants climb and bite. In the morning,
every morning, there is rain.

Something tourists look at. Something to consume.

Bottles of amber gasoline
ranged on a roadside stand.
Blue plastic funnel swinging in the wind.

How to compass a country: my glasses
smeared with sweat.
Now our grief is put away-

Green loops of jungle overtake red road.

*

Papaya trees and bo trees,
corrugated metal on the sand.
On the shoreline, mattresses,

bottles. Bookbags. Clumps of string
where the ocean, having eaten
recedes to chew its cud-

*

Later, we ride in trucks
past boats that ploughed ashore
Orange Devil and Blue Angel
propellers sunk deep in the clay.

Everywhere, framed faces of the dead.
As if they have yet to discover.
As if a *when* existed,

as if a *where*.

*

The sun is a finger pushing through
the plastic sheet of sky.

*

Skin of the morning breaks
her body the color of teak
she scrubs the courtyard with a ragged broom

as a shrimp farmer checking his crop
holds a jar of water
to the light.

Through the jar
there are people running.
Through the jar, a wall of black sea.

Then there was not one bird sound. Not one dog.

*

I heard the water coming, the sound of breaking glass-

Trees and roots were stuck across a door.

I said to myself, Patrice, you have to break your leg.

To become one with the water, not to fight.

*I took a breath of water.
I began to kick and die.*

*At first it was very painful in my body
then it was very beautiful
sound and light*

*

*Mei dei, she says, could not
the child swept from her arms-
A yellow gecko ripples down the wall.*

*

*On the razor-wire fence
their bodies sliced like soap-*

*

As if to enumerate. As if to begin.
But the bag of salt I carry in my sack
cannot suffice

for her body the color of teakwood
for the gold and sodden color
of her name

*

*When we washed up, we were naked.
I hung by my foot from a tree.*

Smell of fish and sewer, salt and mud.

*

A night sky filled with birds
op op grip grip of frogs.
In the hall, our sandals wet with sand
green jungle and red earth.

The one white thread that binds up all
held in the hands of the monks.

And the tree had yellow flowers.

A leaf embossed with rain
scent of onion
crushed in the soiled air.

*

*Months after on the beach,
someone asked him for a cigarette.
When he turned there was no one there*

but he felt a thump on his chest.

*Then he spoke in English for an hour
- this is verified - then he said
in English, I want to go home.*

*

New houses
calamine-lotion pink
but we paint the child's room white

The ocean offers one blue palm
as if to show it's empty
then spits up a bone-

*

How to compass a country. How else
to begin. *Evil spirits bent the tree
on which the ocean rests-*

As the child framed by muddy road
waves to our passing truck
recites from her father's arms

hello bye bye

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Words by Anne Shaw

for Anne Shaw

now our grief is put away

Robert McClure

Slow, calm

Soprano

Electronics

0'00" - 0'50"

water, bamboo wind chimes

p

mp

stretch

1 2 3

She scrubs the court-yard with a rag-ged broom as red ants climb and bite.

mf

p

mf

mp

computer harmonization of voice

Something tourists...

middle cluster will start to bend around pitches

chord continues

4 5 6

In the morn ing, ev-ery morn-ing, there is rain. Bot-tles of am-bergas-o-line ranged on a road-side stand.

17 *mf*

mp *pp*

whisper, accentuating consonants

Blue plas-tic fun - nel swing- ing in the wind. How to com- pass a coun- try my glass- es smeared with sweat

mp cresc. *f* *slower mp*

voice is granulated

now our grief is... Green loops of jun- gle ov- ertake red road. Pa- pa- ya trees and bo trees, cor- ru-

starts to stutter *SNAP!* wood snapping sounds *ca. 10"*

7 8 9

computer harmonization of voice

ga-ted me-tal on the sand. On the shore line where the ocean having eat en re-cedes to chew its cud

mattresses, bottles... "mattresses" echo Later we ride in trucks...

tape fades wood snapping sounds

10 11 12

mp *f*

The sun is a finger pushing through the plastic sheet of sky.

...framed faces of the dead... as if a when existed, as if a where.

granulated pitch metal screeching filtered ticks metal screeching squeaks and scratches

55 *mf* **3** **3** **3** *pp*

Skin___ of the morn - ing breaks her bo - dy the co - lor of teak she scrubs the court - yard

she
buffer playback

\emptyset
&^{bb}.....|

13

61 *mf* *mp*

Speak plainly - O'11" -

with a rag-ged broom_____ as a shrimp farmer checking his crop holds a jar of water to the light. Through the jar___

granulated versions of the text

granulated pitch

soft electronic pitch
granulated pitch

\emptyset
&^{bb}.....|

14

68

there are people running, Through the jar a wall of black sea. Then there was not one bird sound. Not one dog.

granulated pitch

screaching swell

mf

mf

mp > p

15

75

Speak loudly, with subtle emotion - 0'20" - pp

I heard the water coming...
you have to break your leg...
become one with the water, not to fight...

I took a breath of water. I began to kick and die. At first it was very painful in my body, then it was very beautiful, sound and light.

0'40"

deep noises, moans, screeches, water

high screech

screech cuts off, reverb

computer granulates voice computer harmonization of voice

mp *mf* *whisper* *mp* *p cresc.*

On a ra-zor wi-re fence their bo-dies sliced like soap. Now our grief

yellow gecko ripples down the wall

speech with interruptions

pitch *As if to...*

previous chord fades

16 17 18 19 20 21

97

mf *mp* *p* *mp*

is put a way. When we washed up, we were na - ked. I hung by my foot from a tree. Smell of

sodden color of her name...

delays with reverb

22 23 24 25

106 *mf* *f* *p* *mf*

fish and se - wer, salt and mud. A night sky filled with birds op op grip grip of frogs. In the hall our san-dals wet with

26 27

114 *f* *ff* *mp* *mf* stretch

sand, green jun - gle and red earth. The one white thread that binds us all held in the hands of the monks.

114

122

p

A leaf em-bossed with rain scent of on - ion crushed in the soil - ed air. _____

and the tree had yellow flowers

pitches continue

28

129

p

mp

mf

slightly faster

I want to go home. _____ New hou - ses ca-la-mine lo-tion pink but we paint the child's room white. _____

*Months after...
...then he said in English...*

pitches continue

29 Wait until you hear bending pitches (3)

30

138

The o-cean of-fers one blue palm as if to show its emp-ty then spits up a bone

bending pitches

bending pitches
water sounds

145

How to com-pass a coun try how else to be-gin E-vil spi rits bent the tree on which the o-cean rests

the sound of going underwater

chords continue

153

Speak plainly, softly without whispering

- 0'20" -

As the child framed by muddy road waves to our passing truck recites from her father's arms

161 *pp*

hel - lo bye bye

pitches fade water fades bamboo chimes end