

Paul STEENHUISEN - PROGRAM NOTES

PIECE: Green Tara

According to legend, the Buddha of Compassion (Chenrezig) vowed that he would not rest until he had liberated all sentient beings from samsara, the continual cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. Having witnessed seemingly insurmountable hardships, his resolve waned, and he became despondent, weeping tears so plentiful that they formed a lake. From this lake of tears, a lotus flower grew, and when it bloomed, the goddess Tara was revealed.

Tara (Sanskrit for “star”) is the goddess of universal compassion, representing virtuous, enlightened action. She comes to our aid to relieve us of physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. There are twenty-one emanations of her, embodied in different colours and poses, each fulfilling a different premise. Because of her essential goodness, Tara was granted the right to assume her human form as a man, but declined, vowing to remain a woman for all of her lifetimes, and to work for the welfare of all.

The Green Tara (Ārya Tārā) is the main deity of the twenty-one Taras. Known as the Noble Liberator, she is a star by which to navigate, and it is believed she helps to overcome dangers, fears, and anxieties. Her icon is depicted in a posture of ease and readiness, with her green colour symbolizing air, action, and protection. Her left leg is folded in the contemplation position, while her right leg is outstretched, ready to spring into action. She holds her left hand in a gesture granting refuge, and her right hand is held in a giving way. She also holds in her hands closed blue lotuses (utpalas), symbolizing power and purity.

Musically, the piece *Green Tara* is in three sections that aim to express profound aspects of her character. The first part of the work is an interpretation of Green Tara’s Mantra Praise *Om tāre tuttāre ture sohā*, which can be understood as a statement of devotion to Tara. By reciting the mantra, one liberates the heart from samsara, the eight fears, disease, disturbing thoughts, and other sufferings. Through transference to sound, the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in samsara is reflected in the onset, decay, and repetition of structurally significant notes played by the piano.

The second section of the music is a setting of text written by the first Dalai Lama (Gyalwa Gendun Drubpa, 1391-1475), which describes the Eight Dangers from which Green Tara protects us. These are *The Lion of Pride*, *The Elephant of Ignorance*, *The Fire of Anger*, *The Snake of Jealousy*, *The Thieves of Distorted Views*, *The Chain of Miserliness*, *The Flood of Attachment*, and *The Carnivorous Demon of Doubt*. Through Markov chains (Andrey Markov – 14 June, 1856 to 20 July, 1922), the same primary material is reiterated in related forms, each in a sense a different incarnation of the same source. The second section dovetails with the third, which is a varied reprise of the opening Mantra Praise. Multiple instances of the mantra accumulate and are absorbed into a unified, yet expansive, pensive piano texture that vibrates with direct connection to the sound of a Tibetan Tingsha Bell, from which all basic material in the piece is derived.

Green Tara was commissioned by Kathleen Corcoran and Roger Admiral with the support of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. It was inspired by a trip to the province of Sikkim, India, and is dedicated to Arya Tara Steenhuisen Narwani (born 14 June, 2012).

TEXTS

MANTRA PRAISE

Om t̄āre tutt̄āre ture sohā

THE EIGHT DANGERS

1. The Lion of Pride

Dwelling in the mountains of ego Puffed up and holding itself superior It claws other beings with contempt The Lion of Pride

2. The Elephant of Ignorance

Not tamed by the sharp hooks of mindfulness and vigilance Dulled by the maddening liquor of sensual pleasures It enters false paths and shows its harmful tusks The Elephant of Ignorance

3. The Fire of Anger

Driven by the wind of unseemly attention Billowing forth swirling clouds of delinquency It has the power to burn down forests of goodness The Fire of Anger

4. The Snake of Jealousy

Lurking in the pit of ignorance Unable to bear the excellence of others It swiftly injects them with its cruel poison The Snake of Jealousy

5. The Thieves of Distorted Views

Roaming the fearful wilds and the barren wastes Of nihilism and absolutism They sack the towns and hermitages of benefit and bliss The Thieves of Distorted Views

6. The Chain of Miserliness

Binding embodied beings In the unbearable prison of cyclic existence It locks them in craving' s tight embrace The Chain of Miserliness

7. The Flood of Attachment

Sweeping us in the torrent of cyclic existence so hard to cross Conditioned by the propelling winds of karma Tossed in the waves of birth, aging, sickness and death The Flood of Attachment

8. The Carnivorous Demons of Doubt

*Roaming in the space of darkest confusion Tormenting those who strive for the
ultimate aims It's visiously lethal to liberation The Carnivorous Demons of Doubt*

MANTRA PRAISE VIBRATIONS

Please protect us from these dangers