



John C. Hawthorne

THE CROSSING

PRISM QUARTET

THE CROSSING Katy Avery, Nathaniel Barnett, Karen Blanchard, Steven Bradshaw, Aryssa Burrs, Ryan Fleming, Joanna Gates, Dimitri German, Michael Hawes, Steven Hyder, Michael Jones, Lauren Kelly, Anika Kildegaard, Elijah McCormack, Maren Montalbano, Rebecca Myers, James Reese, Daniel Schwartz, Rebecca Siler, Tiana Sorenson, Daniel Spratlan, Daniel Taylor, Jackson Williams, Shari Wilson

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PRISM QUARTET

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ALTO SAXOPHONE Zachary Shemon

TENOR SAXOPHONE Matthew Levy

BARITONE SAXOPHONE Taimur Sullivan

PROGRAM

On the Dignity of Man (2004/05) by Bernd Franke

Self-Portraits 1964, Unfinished by Martin Bresnick (World premiere)

- I. His Own Identity
- II. I Wake
- III. Where Lies The Final Harbor
- IV. The Darkling Thrush
- V. Of Mortal Beauty
- VI. To Fling Out Broad Its Name

Commissioned by The Crossing, Donald Nally, conductor, and PRISM Quartet, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia. *Self-Portraits 1964, Unfinished* was recorded this week for future commercial release.

NOTES & TEXTS

On the Dignity of Man

Music by Bernd Franke

After a text by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

A note from the composer:

On the Dignity of Man is one of the key philosophical documents of the Renaissance, a speech by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, never given and only retained in written form.

Looking for a suitable text for my project for the Sächsisches Vocalensemble and the Raschèr Saxophonquartett, I was pointed in the direction of this work because of its central theme by my friend, the writer David Bengree-Jones.

This corresponding short passage portrays the address which Pico has God give to the first man. It is to be found at the beginning of the oration.

I have not used the original Latin text but have rather set an English translation which I have divided into five short extracts.

The choir and saxophone quartet hardly appear together; the five choral extracts are dovetailed and interlinked with the five short movements for the saxophone quartet. Both groups inhabit their own musical world. The choir is often used

aleatorically and in a declamatory fashion; by way of minimal rhythmic shifts an, in-part, up to 20 voice polyphonic-modal picture is brought about giving an intended distance and timelessness.

The saxophone quartet is "more earthy", more energetic, more bound within its rhythmic and melodic structure, more concentrated in its handling of tone, - dirtier! Dovetailing and overlapping are produced by the use of a few central intervals such as the fourth and the fifth, sometimes "pushed aside" by Tritoni or "towers of fifths". Only in the closing part does the choir break out of its behavioral pattern and begin to shout, then to speak, finally reducing to a whisper. Up to this part really everything has already been said; and here begins the reprise of certain extracts from the text.

– Bernd Franke, April 2005

"We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself. I have placed thee at the center of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have we made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine."

– Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), *De hominis dignitate* (1486/87)

Self-Portraits 1964, Unfinished

Music by Martin Bresnick

Words by Herman Melville, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Hardy and James Joyce.

A note from the composer:

When I was 17, I was living alone, working as a maintenance man and trash collector in one of the city's housing projects to earn enough to attend a new school. I would rise in darkness and travel to my job by train. In breaks, high on rooftops where sea birds took refuge in the hot summer of 1964, I read books carried in my back pocket and reflected on others I had studied in my first year at university. After work, at small clubs and coffee houses, I listened to music with others of my kind, returning late at night.

Now a much older man, I imagine that the texts I read and the music of the six movements of *Self-Portraits 1964, Unfinished* are a memoir evoking my youthful state of mind then – rising before dawn, traveling, working, reading, listening, coming home.

*In the rattling train, I remember
The long day and night,
Music, friends, lovers,
Words understood*

*And misunderstood
Ride with me,
Connecting and disconnecting
As the train sways.*

*Thoughts arising, fading,
Falling toward sleep, I consider
"What I do is me:
For that I came."*

– Martin Bresnick, February 2023

I. His Own Identity

No man can feel
His own identity aright,
Except his eyes be closed,

As if darkness were indeed
The proper element
Of our essences.

– Herman Melville (1819-1891), *Moby Dick*, Chapter 11, "Nightgown" (1851)

II. I Wake

I wake and feel
The fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours
We have spent this night!

What sights you, heart, saw;
Ways you went! And more must,
In yet longer light's delay.
With witness I speak this.

Bitter would have me taste:
My taste was me;
Bones built in me,
Flesh filled, blood brimmed
The curse. Selfyeast of spirit
A dull dough sours.

I see the lost are like this,
And their scourge to be
As I am mine,
Their sweating selves;
but worse.

– Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day" (c. 1886)

III. Where Lies The Final Harbor

Where lies the final
Harbor whence we unmoor
No more? In what rapt
Ether sails the world,

Of which the weariest
Will never weary?

Where is the foundling's
Father hidden?

Our souls are like
Those orphans whose
Unwedded mothers
Die in bearing them:

The secret of
Our paternity
Lies in their grave, and
We must there to learn it.

– Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, Chapter 114, "The Gilder"

IV. The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a woodland gate
When frost was spectre-grey.
And winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

Tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres.
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry.
And every spirit upon the earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The century's corpse outleant
His crypt the cloudy canopy
The wind his death lament.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;

An aged thrush, frail gaunt and small
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,

That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

– Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), "The Darkling Thrush"
(*Poems of the Past and Present*, London MacMillan, 1901)

V. Of Mortal Beauty

He was alone. He was unheeded, happy,
And near to the wild heart of life.
He was alone and will-full and wild hearted.

She was alone and still, gazing out to sea.
She seemed like one whom magic had changed
Into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird.
Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's
And pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed
Had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh.
Her thighs, fuller and soft hued as ivory,
Were bared almost to the hips,
Where the white fringes of her drawers
Were like feathering of soft white down.
Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist
And dovetailed behind her.
Her bosom was as a bird's,
Soft and slight, slight and soft
As the breast of some darkplumaged dove.
But her long fair hair was girlish:
And girlish, and touched
With the wonder of mortal beauty, her face.

Long, long she suffered his gaze
And when she felt his presence
And the worship of his eyes
Then quietly withdrew her eyes from his
And bent them towards the stream,
Gently stirring the water with her foot
Here and there, here and there.
And a faint flame trembled on her cheek.

– James Joyce (1882-1941), *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Chapter 4 (1916)

VI. To Fling Out Broad Its Name

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw fláme;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Crying - what I do is me:
For that I came.

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" (1877)

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