

Alec Roth – EARTH AND SKY – words by Vikram Seth

for children's choir and piano with optional percussion quartet

commissioned by the BBC for the Proms 2000 season

first performed by the Finchley Children's Music Group, Joanna MacGregor (piano) and the Ensemble Bash percussion quartet, conducted by Nicholas Wilks, Royal Albert Hall, London, 18 July 2000

*. . . The earth so high, the sky so low -
How may I see where I must go?
The dust so wet, the rain so dry -
How shall I know the me that's I? . . .*
(Vikram Seth)

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Earth and Sky was commissioned by the BBC for the Proms 2000 season. In keeping with the millennial theme, a work presenting a vision of the future was requested. Trying to be helpful, the BBC provided me with the predictions of various pundits, but their ideas seemed dizzyingly contradictory.

Then the simple thought struck me that however varied and complex the answers, the big questions will always remain the same. We may now have a map of the human genome, but how to use the map? "How shall I know where I should go? How may I see the I that's me?"

As a musician I am hopeful that, no matter how the world develops, future generations will still come together to "dance and sing and play". The mysterious power of music to bind us socially and inspire us individually seems to be built into our genes.

So, a song of questions; a song about music – these were the ideas which I took to Vikram Seth, who had generously agreed to write the words for me.

The resulting poem provided lots of inspiration. It is entirely monosyllabic, enabling considerable variety of rhythmic treatment. I love its permutations and its imagery of paradox and inversion and I have amused myself by playing similar games with the musical material. But there is seriousness as well as fun - the text's juxtaposition of the certainty of death with the search for purpose in life achieves great poignancy when sung by young voices.

DURATION

ca. 12 minutes

FORCES REQUIRED

Children's Choir (SA with divisions and some solo parts)

Piano (playing from the Vocal Score)

Optional Percussion Quartet:

Marimba, Vibraphone, large Bass Drum, pedal Bass Drum, 5 Roto-toms, 3 Tam-tams, Chinese Opera Gong, small Nipple Gong, Hi-hat, suspended Cymbal, Ching (or Antique Cymbals), Cowbells, 4 Temple Blocks, Vibraslap, Lion's roar

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Vocal Score

Full Score (for version with Percussion Quartet)

4 Percussion Parts

SCORE SAMPLES

Click here for [sample pages](#) of the Vocal Score