

Adrift

Ed Scolding

opera

for

soprano, tenor, accordion, viola & cello

Cast List:
Woman - soprano
Man - tenor

Instrumentation:
Accordion, viola, cello

Duration:
approx 7 mins

Synopsis:
Based on the notorious incident of the 'Left to Die' migrant vessel. 72 African migrants left from Tripoli for Europe, ran into trouble and spent two weeks floating in the Mediterranean, were observed and officially reported by several other vessels but left unaided, leading to the death of 63 of their number. This short opera takes a snapshot through this experience - the migrants are seen by a helicopter and ship, and left, alone.

Libretto

Adapted by Ed Scolding from Wreckage of Dreams by Shaun Gardiner

[The scene, lit only by the moon, is a small raft, adrift on the sea with a dead engine.]

A large number of refugees lie on the raft; they swamp it, almost concealing the shape of the hull. It is as if a mass of bodies floated on the sea. They have been adrift for fourteen days, and are dying of thirst and starvation.

Towards the centre of the group a MAN and a WOMAN lie together. The people lying about them are the CHORUS. The WOMAN clutches a small ragged bundle: a baby. It is silent. She grips it tight but does not look at it.

The sea is busy - a squall is blowing.]

CHORUS
The big waves
roll over.

The sea is black blood
and unforgiving
but lost in the flood
we are still living.

[The squall relents. There is calm.]

MAN
You must sleep my love

WOMAN
My love, how can I sleep -
on land I knew
knew without knowing

MAN
sleep my love

WOMAN
the sun would see me wake.
Here on the waves
nothing is fixed -

MAN
sleep my love

WOMAN
who can know the difference
of sleep's calm
from final silence?

Which the lights
behind the lids?
Which the stars?

[The sun begins to rise, but with it the waves grow more restless.]

CHORUS
Our boards are slick with rot. At night they creak
like the dreamer's ribs when they swell with sleep.
We are dreamless. We await the light.
Day's fire makes change from frost of night.

[The sun has risen. A throbbing is heard, a deep concussive rhythm that gradually builds. The sea is disturbed, beaten back in a widening ring.]

Something above us beats the air,
in and out of the sun it fades.
The angel of our granted prayers,
its halo a whirl of blades.

[The WOMAN holds up her bundle. The MAN holds up his empty hands. Around them, the CHORUS also stir and grasp upwards. The sea streams out in a wide bowl, the raft at its centre.]

WOMAN
My baby - see my baby

MAN
From the sky they came down
to our shouts,
to our hands.

WOMAN
my baby

MAN
We thought they would catch us
up to their clouds,
up to their sun.

WOMAN
my baby

MAN
They only dropped water and bread:
for each of us
a gulp, a crumb.

Kindness half-handed,
cruel, to stretch out
death.

[The helicopter fades away. The light is going with it. The people on the raft fade back into hopelessness.]

MAN
They left.

WOMAN
They may come back.

MAN
Our teeth grind the air
Hunger's fire claims the stomach's ash
Fuel and flames close one flesh.

[Again the sea rises and subsides. The sunset is a fiery gnawing. The shape of a great hull appears on the waves. It draws closer, a huge shadow.]

CHORUS
What is this void approaching?
Its shadow daubs the moon with tar.
Is death, a dog grown bold, encroaching
the wounded sky to scavenge stars?

[The ship circles the raft. Finally it is night.]

MAN
They took pictures of us;
outside a lens
they have no frame
for suffering.

WOMAN

They came so close. Our faces -
they must have seen -
the little bodies.

MAN

They took their pictures and left.

[The ship is disappearing into the distance.]

MAN

Suffering - sensation.

WOMAN

Suffering leaps the sense -
lies in the arms, a child
of the beholder.

MAN

Projections on a skin of screen
is all they see.

WOMAN

Who could see another's misery...

MAN

How can our suffering cross the waves...

WOMAN

and not be in sorrow too?

MAN

when we cannot?

WOMAN

That is why we cannot be

MAN

That is all we are to them

WOMAN and MAN

a mere report of suffering,

WOMAN and MAN with CHORUS

a wreckage of dreams.

CHORUS

(in alternating halves)
They can see everything.
They will do nothing.
They have seen us.
They will not smile on us.

CHORUS

(together, softly)
We are still living
but lost in the flood
and unforgiving.

The sea is black blood.

Roll over

you big waves.

[The sea rises.]

Adrift

Text: Shaun Gardiner

Music: Ed Scolding

Slow, fluid, with expressive rubato throughout ♩ = c.56

Musical score for the first system of "Adrift". The score is in 4/4 time and features five staves: Soprano, Tenor, Accordion, Viola, and Violoncello. The Soprano part is mostly silent. The Tenor part has lyrics: "The big waves roll o - ver. The sea is black blood". The Accordion part has dynamics *mp*. The Viola part has dynamics *ppp* and *pp*. The Violoncello part has dynamics *ppp*, *p*, and *mp*.



Musical score for the second system of "Adrift", starting at measure 6. The Soprano part is silent. The Tenor part has lyrics: "and un - for - giv - ing but lost in the flood we are still liv - ing." and includes a triplet. The Accordion part has dynamics *p*, *f*, and *p*. The Viola part has dynamics *p*. The Violoncello part has dynamics *mf*.

10

p

S. My love, how can I sleep— on land I knew, knew with-out know-ing the sun would

T. You must sleep my love._____ sleep

Accord.

Vla.

Vc. *p* *ppp* *mp* *ppp* *p*



17

14

S. see me. wake. Here___ on the waves, no-thing is fixed— Who can know the di-ffer-ence of sleep's

T. sleep_my love_____

Accord.

Vla.

Vc. *pp* *p* *mp* *ppp*

18

S. *calm from final silence? Which the lights behind the lids? Which the stars?*

T.

Accord.

Vla.

Vc.



23

S.

T. *Our boards are slick with rot. At night they creak like the dream-er's ribs when they swell with*

Accord.

Vla.

Vc.

26

S. 

T. 

Accord. 

Vla. 

Vc. 



31

S. 

T. 

Accord. 

Vla. 

Vc. 