

What is the Price of Experience?

Text by William Blake

Music by Julia Usher

for soprano, flute, vibes, clarinet, cello

What is the price of Experience? do men buy it for a song?
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

It is an easy thing to triumph in the summer's sun
And in the vintage and to sing on the wagon loaded with corn.
It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted,
To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer....

It is an easy thing to laugh at wrathful elements,
To hear the dog howl at the wintry door; the ox in the slaughterhouse
moan;
To see a god on every wind and a blessing on every blast;
To hear sounds of love in the thunderstorm that destroys our enemies'
house;
To rejoice in the blight that covers his field, and the sickness that cuts
off his children,
While our olive and vine sing and laugh round our door....

It is an easy thing to rejoice in the tents of prosperity:
thus could I sing and thus rejoice: but it is not so with me.

from Vala: Night the Second from the Four Zoas
by William Blake

What is the Price of Experience?

For Soprano, Flute, Clarinet, Vibraphone and Cello

This poem, *The Price of Experience*, was placed the centre of a large-scale choral oratorio, *A Grain of Sand in Lambeth* which I wrote in 1986 for the Blake Society of St James' Church, Piccadilly. Under rehearsal pressure, it was omitted from the performance. It has long been in my mind to reset these bleak and yet compassionate words for voice and instruments.

I began the setting in the spring of 2001; and resumed work in early September, in a version for soprano and piano. Their appropriateness to the sombre world of autumn 2001 has haunted me since.

This new version, for soprano and small ensemble was prepared for a concert for Colchester New Music, 2002; a version for soprano and piano has been recorded for Metier Records in January 2002.

In the text, Blake portrays a harsh reality where there is an easy temptation to rejoice over our own good fortune, when others are suffering; and that wisdom is bought at a great price. The poet seems to expose hypocrisy and cynicism; and at the very end, to wearily distance himself from lures of arrogance.

What is the Price of Experience? for Soprano, Fl, Clar (Bb), Vibes, Cello

William Blake

Julia Usher

q=70
Allegro

Flute: *f* dry, erupting suddenly; *mf* subsiding

Clarinet in Bb: *f*; *mf*; *mp*

Soprano: *mp* What is the price_ of ex pe_

Vibraphone: *f*; *mf*

Violoncello: *f*; *mp*

Tempo markings: *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *f*, *mf*, *mp*

Performance instructions: dry, erupting suddenly; subsiding

Watermark: Preview File Only



Faster

Slowing

rall

Steady, intense, but not too much vibrato

Fl. (Flute): flexible, not too slow; *mf*; *mp*; *p*

Cl. (Clarinet): *mp*; *mp*; *p*

S. (Soprano): en(nn)ce(sss).

S. (Soprano): ri en(nn)ce(sss).

Vc. (Violoncello): *mp*; *p*

Tempo markings: *mf*, *mp*, *p*, *mp*, *p*

Performance instructions: flexible, not too slow

Watermark: Preview File Only

2 **A** Attacca Ancora

Musical score for measures 7-9. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Saxophone (S.), Violin (Vib.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Starts at measure 7 with a *sfz* dynamic. Measure 8 has a *fast* marking. Measure 9 has a *q=70* marking.
- Cl.:** Starts at measure 7 with a *sfz* dynamic. Measure 8 has a *mf* dynamic and the instruction "whistling down the wind". Measure 9 has a *p* dynamic.
- S.:** Measure 9 has a *mp* dynamic and the lyrics "Do men buy it".
- Vib.:** Starts at measure 7 with a *mf* dynamic. Measure 8 has a *f* dynamic.
- Vc.:** Starts at measure 7 with a *sfz* dynamic. Measure 9 has a *mp* dynamic.

Musical score for measures 10-12. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Saxophone (S.), Violin (Vib.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Starts at measure 10 with a *mp* dynamic. Measure 11 has a *fast, graceful* marking. Measure 12 has a *p* dynamic.
- Cl.:** Starts at measure 10 with a *mp* dynamic. Measure 11 has a *poco f* dynamic. Measure 12 has a *p* dynamic.
- S.:** Starts at measure 10 with a *still quiet* marking. Measure 11 has a *still quiet* marking. Measure 12 has a *still quiet* marking. The lyrics "For a song?" are present in measures 11 and 12.
- Vib.:** Starts at measure 10 with a *poco f* dynamic. Measure 11 has a *poco f* dynamic. Measure 12 has a *poco f* dynamic.
- Vc.:** Starts at measure 10 with a *poco f* dynamic. Measure 11 has a *poco f* dynamic. Measure 12 has a *poco f* dynamic.

B

12

Fl. *f*

Cl. *f* *mf*

S. *mf* or Wis dom for a dance

Vib. *f* *f*

Vc. *mf* *mf*



13

Fl. *mf* *fast*

Cl. *mf*

S. in the street?

S. in the street?

Vib. *poco f*

Vc. *poco f*

q=90

3

4

16 **C** More sustained

Fl. *ten* *mp*

Cl. *mp*

S. *mp*

Vib. *mf* *mf*

Vc. **C**

No, it is bought with the price of all that a man



D

19 **D** Freely synched

Fl. *p* *sffz*

Cl. *p* *sffz*

S. *p* *mp* *poco sfz* *ren.*

Vib. *p*

Vc. *p* *dolciss* *sffz*

hath: his house, his wife, his child ren.

24 **E** Intense and expansive

Fl. *f*

Cl. *f*

S. *f* Wisdom (mm) is sold in the

Vib. *pp* echo

Vib. *pp*

Vc. *f* *mp*

28 *desolate*

Fl. *p* *pp*

Cl. *pp* *p*

S. *p* de so late mar ket *p* where none (nn)

Vib. *p* *pp*

Vc. *pp*

F A Tempo

32

Fl. *p*

Cl. *p*

S. *p* cometo buy. and in the wither'd fields,

Vib. *mp*

Vib. *mp*

Vc. *pizz mp* *A Tempo arco p* *pizz arco p*



Preview File Only

37

Fl. *mf* flat, bleak, pushing

Cl. *f* *p* *mf*

S. *mf* where the far mer ploughs for bread

Vib. *mf* damped

Vc. *mf* *pizz* *mf* *arco* *f*

G

q=100

Poco Scherzo

44

Fl. *mf*

Cl. *mf*

S. *mf* It is an easy thing, to re

Vib. *mf*

Vc. **Poco Scherzo**



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50

Fl. *f*

Cl. *f*

S. *f* joice in triumph, in the

S. *mf* joice in triumph, in the

Vib. *f*

Vc. *f*

slower, dreamy

Musical score for measures 53-55. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Saxophone (S.), Vibraphone (Vib.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Measure 53 starts with a treble clef, key signature of one flat, and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill and a triplet. Measure 54 continues the melodic line. Measure 55 has a triplet and is marked *ad lib*.
- Cl.:** Measure 53 has a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 54 continues the melodic line. Measure 55 has a triplet and is marked *ad lib*.
- S.:** Measure 53 has a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 54 continues the melodic line. Measure 55 has a triplet and is marked *mf* and *warm*.
- Vib.:** Measure 53 has a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 54 continues the melodic line. Measure 55 has a triplet and is marked *warm, delicate*.
- Vc.:** Measure 53 has a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 54 continues the melodic line. Measure 55 has a triplet.

Lyrics: *mf* sum_____ mer's sun *mf* to

Musical score for measures 56-58. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Saxophone (S.), Vibraphone (Vib.), and Violoncello (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Measure 56 has a treble clef, key signature of one flat, and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 57 continues the melodic line. Measure 58 has a triplet and is marked *f*.
- Cl.:** Measure 56 has a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 57 continues the melodic line. Measure 58 has a triplet and is marked *f*.
- S.:** Measure 56 has a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 57 continues the melodic line. Measure 58 has a triplet and is marked *f*.
- Vib.:** Measure 56 has a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 57 continues the melodic line. Measure 58 has a triplet and is marked *f*.
- Vc.:** Measure 56 has a bass clef and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melodic line with a trill. Measure 57 continues the melodic line. Measure 58 has a triplet and is marked *f*.

Lyrics: sing_____ on the wag gon load ed with corn

10 **H** **Faster, light**

59

Fl. marc

Cl. marc

S. mf It is an ea sy

Vib. mf sfz

Vc.

hold back again

63

Fl. sfz > p

Cl. mf sfz > p

S. smooth slightly harden tone
thing to talk of pat ience to the af flic ted;

Vc. smooth

67 **I** *dreamy*

Fl. *p*

Cl. *p*

S. *mp* to speak of pru dence *p* *chilly*

Vib. *pp*

Vc. *pizz* *arco* *mf* *> mp*

Piu Mosso

71

Fl. *mp* *poco f*

Cl. *mp* *poco f*

S. to the house less wand 'rer

S. to the house less wand 'rer

Vib. *poco f*

Vc. *poco f*

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76

Fl. *mf*

Cl. *mf*

S. *mf* to hear the dog howl at the

Vib. *f*

Vc. *mf* pizz *b* arco



Preview File Only

81

Fl.

Cl.

S. win t'ry door; The ox in the slaugh ter house

Vib. *mf*

Vc. *f*

J

Briefly Expressive

85

Fl. *mf* *pp*

Cl. *mf* *pp*

S. *mf* *p* *pp*

Vib. *mf* *pp*

Vib. *pp*

Vc. *mf* *mp* *pp*

moan

winning

to hear sounds of



Preview File Only

89 *slightly mocking* **K**

Fl. *f*

Cl. *f*

S. *f*

Vib. *f*

Vib. *f*

Vc. *f*

love in the storm that des

senza pedale

92

Fl.

Cl.

S.

trays _____ our _____ en e mies' house, and to

Pno

Vc.

mp

94

Fl.

Cl.

S.

S.

Vc.

tr _____ umph(NN) _____ pp in the

tr _____ umph(NN) _____ pp in the

sfz

f

L

ppp

ppp

(closed, glee)

(closed, glee)

5

97

Fl.

Cl.

S.

S.

blight _____ that co vers his fields, and the sick ness _____ that

blight _____ that co vers his fields, and the sick ness _____ that

pp

pp

3

3

100

Fl.

Cl.

S.

Vc.

mf cuts off his child ren; while our o live and

mp

mp

mf *pizz* *arco* *mp*

smoothly, poco portamento



Preview File Only

104

Fl.

Cl.

S.

Vib.

Vib.

Vc.

vine sing and laugh round our door.

f *poco sfz*

poco sfz

poco sfz

poco sfz

M

108

Fl.

Cl.

S.

Vib.

Vib.

Vc.

tiring a little

mf It is an ea sy thing,

111

Fl.

Cl.

S.

Vib.

Vc.

mf final₂ arousing

mf to re joice in the tents of pros pe ri ty.

f

f

f

f

114

S.

Vc.

disspirited

Thus I could sing and re joice

117 p **Slower, Free.**

Fl.

Cl.

S.
But it is not so with me.....

Vc.
ten ten

mf

Preview File Only