

ET EXPECTO

The Heart Sutra

“Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was dwelling in Rajagrija at Vulture Peak Mountain . . .”

This opening piece is for the most part a monotone recitation of the Heart Sutra, the “Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Wisdom” [as translated by the Padmakara Translation Group] delivered by the Buddha some 2,500 years ago on Vulture Peak Mountain. His message, in so many words, was that “Form is Emptiness” and “Emptiness also is Form”. All of our human conceptions, feelings, dreams, and every aspect of our physical reality is subsumed and therefore “contained” in emptiness. In this piece, the Buddha’s name is marked by a minor third, and points of emphasis are expressed in octaves. In this musical recitation, with single unison notes I tried to pay attention to the overtones produced and the subtle interplay of notes and vibrations that brought them to life.

And I Await the Resurrection of the Pedal Steel Guitar

I remember very clearly the first time many years ago I heard Olivier Messiaen’s massive “Et Expecto Resurrectionum Mortuorum”. I was in my car driving down the freeway in Houston, Texas on my way to a country-western gig. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. After two minutes or so I had to pull over to the side of the road until the music ended. It has been with me ever since, from the low octaves at the beginning to the gripping propulsive conclusion. So my song is in part an homage to this monumental work by Messiaen (with which it shares the first three notes), and also expresses my own feelings on the current state of the instrument I play, the pedal steel guitar, and my hopes for its future. In this piece I wanted the whole body of the instrument – the legs, the pedals, the wood, the strings, tuning keys, bridge and nut, and pickup – to tell its story. I know the time will someday come when the steel guitar will again sing its own song – a song with a sense of majesty, ecstasy, and beauty approaching that of Messiaen.

The Glass is Already Broken

was written to accompany a recitation of the short poem “Broken Glass” by Amarillo, Texas poet Richard Todd.

The First Turning of the Wheel

is my open letter to the late Bob Graettinger, the brilliant composer and arranger for Stan Kenton’s “This Modern World/City of Glass”. To my ears, Graettinger’s work conjures a stark landscape of urban alienation, existential loneliness, and (oddly enough) musical

beauty. This song is like a conversation with a dear friend whom I've never met – a fellow human being. A soft hand on the shoulder, a touch to express what in words is inexpressible.

The Second Turning of the Wheel

Is a continuance of the silent conversation of “The First Turning of the Wheel, but with a slightly different touch, sound, and emphasis.

Three Minute Warning

Quite often these days, I find it difficult to retain my sense of optimism for the future – both of the planet on which we live, and for the lives of the people, animals, and plants who inhabit it. Three minutes is a relatively short amount of time, but with the immanence of danger in the word “warning”, there is always implied a glimmer of hope.

For me, it is music that is hope – the notes, the sounds, the vast and limitless universe that exists within and between each note, each sound, each breath, and every smile. It is my hope that we all awaken to this melody. If you listen closely you can hear it now. It's a song you've known all your life – a dark, mysterious, and primordial song of the heart.

Susan Alcorn
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