

Program Note:

The text for *From The Eumenides* is taken from the third play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy by the same name (458 BCE). This play is considered to contain the first known description of a (fictitious) court case from the then recently established Greek legal system. The court, which is situated at Areopagus (outside of Athens) and has a jury consisting of 12 Athenians, is to decide whether the Furies' (Erinyes') persecution and punishment of Orestes is just. He has killed his mother Clytemnestra but claims that it was revenge for her murder of his father Agamemnon. In the end he is found innocent and the Furies are placed under the protection of Athens.

For me, this story has a deep resonance in contemporary society. The fact that the Greeks could come to a seemingly civilised solution to such a complex ethical problem two and a half millennia ago is a sign of how little our society has developed since. In those days a large proportion of society was driven by fundamentalist religious ideals where the concept of an eye for an eye was considered to be applicable – this is still very much the case. Aeschylus' texts also brings up a series of other interesting ethical and philosophical dilemmas that are equally valid today as they were then. The settlement at the end of the play should be reflected upon even though it is arrived at on false premises.

My piece does not approach these ethical or philosophical issues; it consists merely of seven shorts musical movements – when I read the text I found seven extracts that I thought would be interesting to set to music. Nevertheless, the concepts that I have addressed here clearly had a great influence on me during the compositional process. Be it the bareness of the musical character or the irreconcilable melodic lines, *From The Eumenides* has to me become a symbol of the linearity of time and the horizontal stagnation of the human condition.

*I. A song without music,
A sword in the senses,
[A storm in the heart] – left out
And a fire in the brain;
A clamour of Furies
To paralyse reason,
A tune full of terror,
A drought in the soul!*

*II. Seek neither silence where no laws compel
Nor slavery beneath a tyrant's rod
Where liberty and rule are balanced well
Success will follow as the gift of [god].*

*III. Will you still sleep?
Oh wake!
What use are you asleep?
Since you so slight me,
I am abused unceasingly
Among the other dead,
For him I killed,
And wander displeased and shamed.
I tell you truly,
By them all I'm held guilty and condemned.*

IV. Though we are many few words will suffice

*V. The gleaming snake that darts winged from my golden bow
And painfully speweth forth the black foam that you suck
From the sour flesh of murderers.
What place have you within these walls?
Some pit of punishments, where heads are severed,
Eyes torn out, throats cut, manhood unmanned,
Some hell of maimings, mutilations, stonings,
Where bodies impaled on stakes melt the mute air with groans
Your place is there.*

*VI. Now for this one brief hour
You see these rangers quiet,
These hunters caught in sleep;
These ancient ageless hags,
Whose presence neither man
Nor beast could bear.*

*VII. Come dread and friendly powers
Who love and guard our land;
And while devouring flame
Fill all your path with light.
Gather with gladness to your rest
And let every voice
Crown our song
With a shout of joy*