

"I, John, was in the isle that is called Patmos... for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet." (Rev. 1:9-10) Thus begins the Apocalypse. Its intense and unrelenting visions are, unusually, given an association with a place—Patmos. Throughout the book, the apostle John interacts not merely through detached "gazing into heaven," but with his immediate environment. Dean Arthur Stanley wrote after visiting Patmos in 1862, "...as in all the prophetic visions of the Bible, the outward imagery is taken from the objects and circumstances immediately at hand and around...the bright sky, the wide sea, the lofty mountains, the grotesque rocks, the sandy beach of Patmos...enter into the picture." It is this actualization of the environment that provides the impetus for Petr Eben's "Landscapes," just as it has inspired many other artists' depictions of John (including Bosch, Botticelli, and Gustave Dore). However, the images are not straightforward or representational. Eben states in his preface: "These events and symbols, which are inspired by the abstract and expressed pictorially, are diffused by the music into an analogical representation rather than pictorial." In other words, Eben wishes to express the things referred to by the images rather than the images themselves.

There are five movements in this cycle, which form a chiasmus (a mirroring structure no doubt recalled to Eben's mind by its Hebrew associations) centered around the "Landscape with Temple—" that is, the throne room and Holy of Holies, from which all the action of Revelation is directed. Movements 2 and 4, sharing thematic material, relate to "symbols that are close to the throne" (Eben). 1 and 5, the "animal" movements, represent emissaries to the earth itself, and "provide the dramatic elements to the work."

I. "Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!'" (Rev. 8:13) The eagle is an announcement and warning of the impending acts of God. As such, Eben's treatment is declamatory and expository, punctuated with rock-splitting emphases. The word is definite and inexorable; but the movement ends with a hush, unsure what will follow.

II. "Round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting..." (Rev. 4:4) The twenty-four elders appear many times in the Apocalypse, always acting as a chorus. They respond to whatever is done or said by God with acclamation and worship. This word and response dialogue is the impetus behind Eben's treatment. After every line there is a rhythmic chorus of assent.

III. Solemnity and eternity are found here at the center. Eben is pondering things such as the "sea of glass, like crystal" (Rev. 4:6), and the "smoke of incense, which is the prayers of the saints." (8:3) For Eben himself, a survivor of Buchenwald and of a difficult subsequent forty years under a stridently anti-Christian communism, the feeling of exile was familiar as it was to John, and the "door opened into heaven" clearly represents a life-giving devotional access. All the wars of Armageddon never touch the throne.

IV. "Around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald." (4:3) Rainbows are, of course, only seen as refraction through water droplets. Here the mist and vapor is provided; the light of the throne shines through in color.

V. The four horses are possibly the most famous of all apocalyptic imagery. As the eagle announced judgment, now the horsemen are given power to execute it. But the end of the world only presages final victory. Eben states: "I have used two plainsong quotations: the fateful Horses are characterized by the descending *Dies Irae* motif, which eventually gives way to the redeeming *Victimae Paschali* at the end...which with its ascending melody appears almost as an inversion of the falling *Dies Irae* melody." (*Victimae Paschali* is the celebratory sequence hymn of Easter.) Commenting on Rev. 1:10, Christina Rossetti writes: "Earth is passing with all her joys,/ Heaven shall pass away with a noise./ So from us all follies that please us,/ So from us all falsehoods that ease us,—/Only all saints abide with their Jesus." In this year, the tenth anniversary of Petr Eben's death, a fitting message for the end of his "festive and dramatic" cycle.