

ABOUT THE WORK

James Lee III, composer

Night Visions of Kippur

To be performed by Ritz Chamber Players at Meany Hall on February 15, 2012.

A presentation of the UW World Series.

Night Visions of Kippur is a musical commentary largely based on the seventh chapter of the biblical book of Daniel. It is in this particular chapter that Daniel had a vision in which he saw various animals with unnatural characteristics. There was a lion with eagle's wings, a bear with three ribs in his mouth, a four-headed leopard with wings, and a terrible beast with iron teeth and ten horns on its head. *Night Visions of Kippur* is cast into three movements: *Flying Lions, Thrones, Opened Books*; *A Narrow Pathway Traveled*; and *Iron Teeth, Pompous Words!* The name Daniel means "God is my judge," and "Kippur" is the Hebrew term for the "day of atonement," which was also a day of judgment; hence the thrones put into place, and the books were open.

Flying lions, thrones, opened books begins with music suggesting that we have entered the vision already in progress. There are ascending and descending gestures in the piano accompanied with string glissandi, and woodwind flourishes. As the music continues, there are dialogues between various parts of the ensemble, which illustrates the fierceness of these animals. Suddenly, the scene changes into one that is more serene with cello and violin solos evoking the heavenly judgment scene. The next scene displays the career of the beast with iron teeth and ten horns on its head.

A Narrow Pathway Traveled is inspired by a dream of a woman who lived in the 19th century and died in the early part of 20th century. The music contrasts the scene of a humble group of people traveling a narrow pathway. This music utilizes the intervals of open fifths and long melodic lines. Sensitive and delicate passages convey the idea that these people had "passed through severe trials and conflicts. And it appeared as if

the sun had just risen from behind a cloud and shone upon their countenances, causing them to look triumphant, as if their victories were nearly won.” There is contrasting music that represents a train, which seemed to have most of the world onboard. This train was moving at lightning speed carrying its passengers to their destiny. The music finally rests, evoking a C-sharp minor tonality.

Iron teeth, pompous words! further explores the activities of the beast with iron teeth. The music is structured in a simple ternary form. There is a tonal center of “A.” The aggressive character of the music is increasingly more complex until it is interrupted with a more playful character in the B section. The flute and clarinet play statements, which imitate each other. Then the cello and violin enter with a quasi-fugal passages without an exposition, but only episodes. Once the initial musical material returns, the music is more *passionato* with *maestoso* gestures, woodwind flourishes, and virtuosic passagework until the work ends with an explosion of sound.

--- James Lee III