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COMPOSITION

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## *Fly Away Peter: Scene Four, ‘The War’*

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In the crucial fourth scene of my opera *Fly Away Peter*, premiered in 2015, the protagonist, Jim Saddler, finds himself in the trenches in France during World War I. Working with the librettist Pierce Wilcox, we decided to structure this scene as a series of disconnected vignettes: brief but intense images of horror and violence, as perceived through Jim’s eyes. The excerpt shows the first three of ten such vignettes. The vignettes are framed by statements of a refrain, composed for all three voices accompanied by the full ensemble (bars 1–3, 23–7, 48–52 and 65–7). The text in the refrain fragments and re-orders the phrase ‘it will go on for ever’—never heard in its entirety—while the music for each refrain is based on re-articulations of the notes of a large chord, with winds and strings following different rhythmic cycles counted in semiquavers:

Bars 1–3: winds 3+2 / strings 3+4

Bars 23–7: winds 2+3+2 / strings 3+4+3

Bars 48–52: winds 2+2+3+2 / strings 3+3+4+3

Bars 65–7: winds 2+2+3+2+3 / strings 3+3+4+3+4

These cycles progressively lengthen to the middle of the scene and then contract; the partition of the ensemble also begins to shift. The rhythmic patterns are partially obscured by the fact that some notes are sustained, and the vocal parts select attack points freely from the two layers. Each syllable is articulated by two of the three voices, creating a strange hybrid of homophony and polyphony. The overall intended effect of the refrains is to suggest a vast, impersonal but disordered machine.

The vignettes themselves are focused on intensity of colour. The first vignette (bars 5–22) concerns the ubiquitous rats, whose scurrying is suggested by percussion played with wire

brushes and *sul ponticello* strings. In contrast, the clarinet recalls birds, which are central to Jim's sense of identity.

The second vignette (bars 28–47) depicts Jim's horrified reaction to experiencing a corpse falling out of the wall of his trench, illustrated with *glissandi* and a focus on murky, low-register colours (trombone, bassoon, double bass). This is interrupted by the first of three tiny 'arias' for the mezzo-soprano (bars 33–41), whose role throughout the scene is one of disembodied commentary. These passages are the only places in the scene that use the vibraphone for flashes of jagged, strident brilliance.

The third vignette shows the fate of Stan Mackay, one of Jim's fellow soldiers, whose head is shot off by a sniper. Each of the minor soldier characters played by the tenor is introduced in Scene 3, and each is associated with a particular harmony and a few melodic fragments that recur at each of their subsequent appearances or mentions of their name. These simple ideas serve as fleeting moments of familiarity within the nightmare landscape of the War.

**Scene 4**  
The War

MS. *ff*  
for will ev er

T. *ff*  
for on ev er

JIM (Bar.) *ff*  
on will

① **Ferocious** (♩ = 144)

Cl. *ff*

Bsn. *ff*

Tpt. *ff*

Trb. *ff*

Perc. **Tam-tam** (scrape with triangle beater) *mf* *ff*

Vn. *ff* *p* sul pont.

DB. *ff* *p*

JIM (Bar.) *p with distaste* *mp*  
Feel the rat on your face in the dark Feel the wa - ter from the walls it sweats

⑤

Cl. *p*

Perc. **Drums** wire brushes **Cymbal** *p*

Vn. *pizz.* (fingernail) *mf* *arco* sul pont. *p*

DB. *pizz.* III *mp* *pp* *f* *p*

MS. *p* like a distant memory  
IMOGEN Bird

JIM (Bar.) *p* See the- see- rat *mp* Hold the rat

9

Cl. *pp* (on rims) *p* distant

Perc. *mf* *pp* *mp* Cymbal *p*

Vn. *mp* arco sul pont. *p* *mf* *p*

DB. *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

IMOGEN (MS.) *mp* Fa - mi - liar of life, crea - ture of the air

JIM (Bar.) *mf* *mp* *mf* Fa - mi - liar of death, crea - ture of the un-der-world

13

Cl. *mp* *pp*

Perc. *p* *mf*

Vn. *pizz.* *f* *p* *f* *pp*

DB. *mp* *f*

JIM (Bar.)

See- See the- This world is up-side down.

18

Cl. *p* *mp* *pp*

Bsn. *mp* *pp*

Perc. *mp* *pp* *mp*

Vn. *mp* *p* *pizz.*

DB. *p* *p* *f*

MS. *ff* will ev - er on

T. *ff* go ev - er *mp horrified*

JIM (Bar.) *ff* will go on A

23

Cl. *ff*

Bsn. *ff*

Tpt. *ff*

Trb. *ff*

Perc. *f* *ff* Cymbal Tam-tam

Vn. *ff* *arco ord.*

DB. *ff* *arco ord.*

JIM  
(Bar.)

— hand reached out and touched me From the wall of my trench a corpse

(28)

Cl.

Bsn.

Trb.

Vn.

DB.

*p* *pp* *p* *mp*

*fp* *mf* *pp*

*fp*

MS.

*f prophetic*

Look down: the earth is split An-oth-er world

JIM  
(Bar.)

lurched out

(33)

Cl.

Bsn.

Tpt.

Trb.

Perc.

Vn.

DB.

*p* *f* *mf* *mf* *ff* *ff*

*f* *p* *mf*

**Vibraphone**  
hard mallets  
motor on – slow

*f* *pizz.* *ff* *mf* *ff*

*ff* *ff*

MS. *mp* *mf* *p*  
be-low The dead man turns in his sleep

(37)

Cl. *mp* *p*

Bsn. *mp* *f* *p*

Tpt. *mp* *p*

Trb. *mp* *p*

Perc. *mp* *f* *p*

DB. *mp* arco *gliss.*

JIM (Bar.) *mp* *p* *pp*  
When I sleep now (ev - en in sun - light) I feel the same hand brush my neck

(42)

Cl. *p*

Bsn. *mf* *p*

Trb. *p* *gliss.* *mp* *p*

Perc. *f* *p*

DB. *f* *p* *gliss.* *mf* *p*

MS. *ff* on — go

T. *ff* it go will

JIM (Bar.) *ff* it on will *mp* matter-of-fact Stan Mac-kay

48

Cl. *ff*

Bsn. *ff* *p*

Tpt. *ff* *p*

Trb. *ff*

Vn. arco *ff*

DB. *ff*

T. STAN *p* cautious *mp* more confident  
One look o - ver the pa-ra-pet Two looks o - ver the

JIM (Bar.) — in the trench:

53

Bsn. *p*

Tpt. *p*

Perc. Side Drum snares on *p*

Vn. *p* *mf*

DB. *p* *mf*



*f* urgent  
MS. Sni - per!

STAN (T.) pa - ra - pet -

*p* shocked  
JIM (Bar.) His face is gone I can-not re - mem-ber it I can-not re-mem-ber his

57

Cl. *ppp*

Bsn. *p*

Tpt.

Perc. (rim shot) SD snares off (on rim)

Tam-tam *fff*

Vn. pizz. *fff*

DB. pizz. *fff* arco *ppp*

JIM (Bar.) face A man should not- A man I spoke to with - out a face

61

Cl. *p*

Bsn. *p*

Tpt. *p*

Trb. *p*

DB. *p*

MS. *ff* for go

T. *ff* Ev - er go it

JIM (Bar) Ev - er for it

65

Cl. *ff* (non dim.)

Bsn. *ff* (non dim.)

Tpt. *ff* (non dim.)

Trb. *ff* (non dim.)

Vn. *ff* (non dim.)

DB. *ff*

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains vocal and orchestral parts. The vocal parts (MS., T., and JIM (Bar)) are at the top, with lyrics 'Ev - er for go it'. The MS. part has a dynamic marking of *ff*. The instrumental parts include Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Trb.), Violin (Vn.), and Double Bass (DB.). The Cl., Bsn., Tpt., and Trb. parts have dynamic markings of *ff* and include 'non dim.' markings. The Vn. part has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a 'non dim.' marking. The DB. part has a dynamic marking of *ff*. A rehearsal mark '65' is located to the left of the instrumental parts. The score is in 3/4 time and features various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.