James Cave

Philae's Landing
For Paul Gameson, and Ebor Singers

First performed 21st November 2015 at the National Centre for Early Music

Scoring: SSAATTBB choir, with baritone/tenor and soprano solos

Duration: c. 5 mins 30

On 12 November 2014, after ten years of space travel, the Philae space-probe achieved the first-ever landing on the surface of a comet, and sent the first-ever images from a comet’s surface back to Earth. Only three days later, the probe fell silent: its solar-powered batteries had failed, due to lack of sunlight. This summer, Philae briefly reawoke, only to descend once more into silence. Its last reported communication was on 9 July 2015.

David Thorley’s poem is a reimagining of the Cecilian Ode, a hymn of praise to music and its role in the celestial order, for the 21st century, told from the perspective of the lonely space-probe.

In this score, vocal slurs indicate phrasing, not melismas.

Philae’s landing

A smut on a string, half a year asleep,
I woke under falling hammers and the verve
of trilled vibrations. Down the scale beat
in dozens the sprung mechanical nerve
of accidents and grace notes; somewhere deep
the pedalling of thunder and the churn
of cadences uncoiled, unsoft, unsweet,
a shriek to dampen and a chill to burn,
a catcall from the universe’s keep.

But sure I found orbit, true as the tides
and calm I heard music, bright as the skies
True I found orbit, calm as the skies
and bright I sang music, calm as the tides

This place of valves and bellows, each brass ring,
each accent lever and these gears, these wheels,
this instrument of unresolving song
fed through with an unending roll of reels
this yet unwound infinity of string
plays thousands to dozens, gives no relief
no quarter from the caterwauling throng,
and in this waking phase, however brief,
before commitment to the fire, I sing.

So sure I found orbit, true as the tides
and calm I heard music, bright as the skies
True I found orbit, calm as the skies
and bright I sang music, calm as the tides.

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Image: Year at a Comet, Sept 2014 (ESA/Rosetta)
Spacious; not too fast  \( \frac{1}{4} = 56 \\
(Four solo voices)

True

Bright

as

as

the

the

tides

skies
Tenor or baritone solo

A smut_ on a string

A smut string

A smut_
I woke under falling hammers and the skies as alternative and the
vi brations
vi brations
vi brations
vi brations

verve of trilled vi brations
Down beat
Down beat
Down beat
Down beat

(Full)
(Full)
(Full)
(Full)
(Full)
Down the scale beat in dozens

Down the scale beat in dozens

Down beat Down_______ in dozens

Downbeat Down_______ in dozens

Down beat Down_______ in dozens

Down beat Down_______ in dozens
the sprung mechanical nerve of

the sprung mechanical nerve of

the sprung mechanical nerve

the sprung mechanical nerve

Down the beat of

Down the beat of

Pno.
accidental grace notes somewhere

accidental grace notes somewhere

Accidental grace notes somewhere

Accidental grace notes somewhere

Accidental grace notes somewhere
shriek to damp pen and a chill to burn

shriek to damp en and a chill to burn to burn

shriek to dam pen and a chill to burn to burn

shriek and a chill to burn

shriek and a chill to

shriek to dam pen and a chill to burn

shriek and a chill to
from the universes keep

cat call from the universes keep

---

cat

call

---

from the universes keep
Sure I found___ or___ bit_________

(semi-chorus - distant-sounding)

A.

pppp

aah

(semi-chorus - 'distant-sounding')

A.

pppp

aah

(semi-chorus - 'distant-sounding')

A.

pppp

aah

(semi-chorus - distant-sounding)

T.

pppp

aah

(semi-chorus - distant-sounding)

B.

pppp

aah

(semi-chorus - distant-sounding)
True as the tides and calm I heard music bright as the
skies True I found or a bit Calm as the
skies and bright I sang music calm as the tides
True this place each brass ring

as this place each brass ring

tides this place each brass ring

This place of valves and bel lows

This place of valves and bel lows
Bright
the skies
each brass ring
each accent lever
each brass ring
each accent lever
This instrument of unreality, as these gears these wheels and these gears these wheels and these gears these wheels and these gears these wheels
the skies Calm

the skies as

the skies

the skies

the skies

the skies

sol ving song fed through with an un en ding roll____ of reels plays

the skies tides

This yet____ un wound in fin ni ty____ of string plays
thou sands to do zens gives no relief

the tides

the tides

the tides

the tides

no relief

no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

thou sands to do zens gives no relief

no relief
no quarter from the cat er waul ing throng

no quarter from the cat er waul ing

no quarter from the cat er waul ing

no quarter from the cat er waul ing

No quarter

No quarter

No quarter

No quarter
Bright

as

(solo)

phase how ever brief

Be fore com

the

skies
S. \( \text{Calm} \)

A. \( \text{sfpp as} \)

T. \( \text{mf pp (full) sfpp} \)

T. \( \text{mit ment to the fire I sing the} \)

B. \( \text{sfpp skies} \)

Pno. \( \text{pp} \)