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An Autoethographic Composition in Response to the Poetry of David Vogel. [Composition] (Unpublished)

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The Dark Gate: An Autoethographic Composition in Response to the Poetry of David Vogel

UoA 33 Single-Component Output with contextual information

David Lancaster

2017

Fig. 1 David Vogel

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The Dark Gate – 300 word statement

Situated in my autoethnographic research as composer, this work seeks to explore and develop a response to the events of the Holocaust through a setting of words by David Vogel. In composing The Dark Gate, I was attempting to understand more deeply a relationship with the past, and in this case with traumatic events which were not experienced first-hand but which impact profoundly upon cultural memory, though a re-telling of the narrative in such a way as it reflects my own experiences (I translated Vogel's poetry into English and visited Auschwitz to find his name in the register of those killed). As Chang (2008, 49–50) says, "autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self".

Vogel's text provides an authentic vehicle for an explorative re-telling and a framework for the five songs; although his poems are ordered in such a way as to create a narrative which traces a path leading from notions of 'home' towards the events of the Holocaust, the musical trajectory of the songs is not directly linear; material from the opening song (the repeating high F, for example), recurs independent of the poetic structure, and there are other recurring themes and devices spanning the work to create meaning within a highly contrasted musical landscape, in effect creating a multi-layered montage. Eisenstein, who developed this cinematic technique wrote that 'the future of montage lies in musical composition'; in this work I attempt to re-present narratives and interlinked themes through the juxtaposition and superimposition of musical fragments. In this instance, the softer transitions (in which there is shared material either side of the 'cut') better satisfied the musical context, although in subsequent work I have been able to develop this technique using much harder, clearer edits.

Research Objectives

Research objective	Evidence
To develop an autoethographic response to events of the Holocaust, mediated by the text of David Vogel.	Score, recording.
To explore notions of re-telling: finding new ways to re-present existing narratives.	Score, recording.
To investigation how cinematic editing techniques might be applied to musical composition.	Score, recording.

Process and dissemination

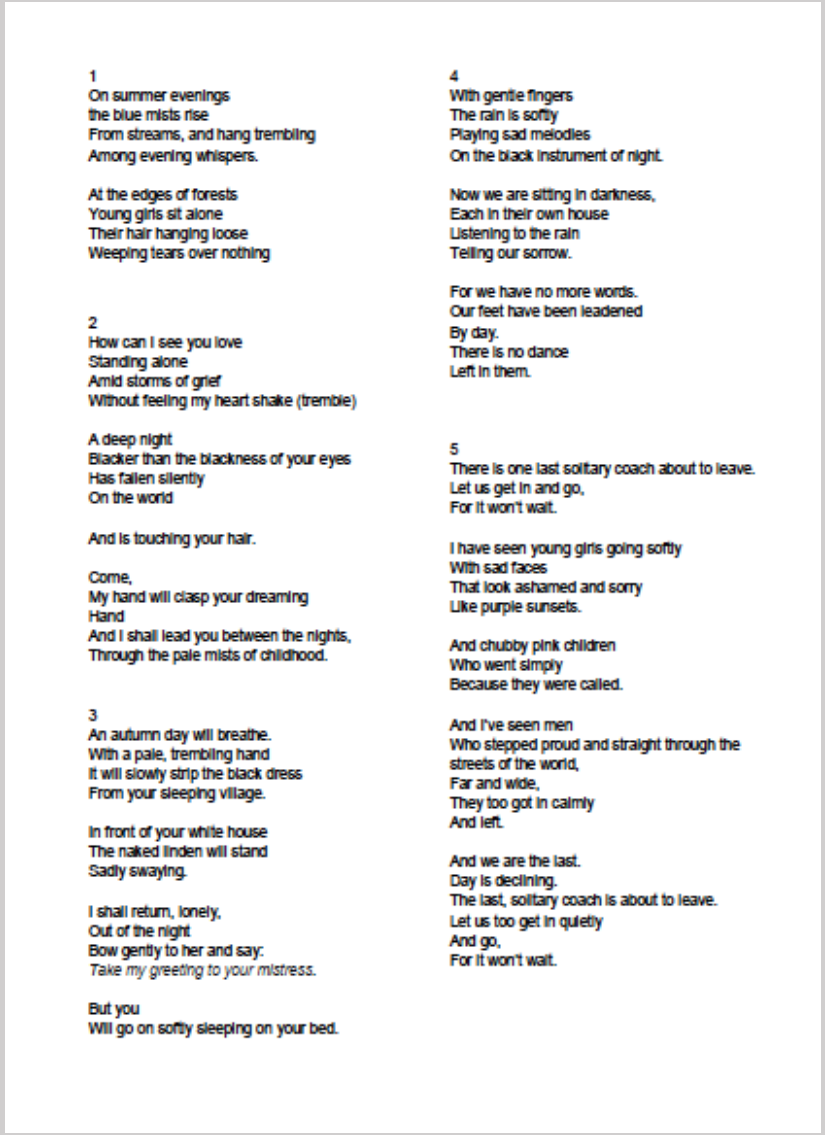
Composed: Spring 2017

Scored for soprano voice and piano

Duration: 12 minutes, approximately.

Performance: The Dark Gate was first performed by Peyee Chen and Kate Ledger (Late Music, York, 5th August 2017) and by Jessica Summers and Jelena Makarova (Ripon Cathedral, performance postponed due to coronavirus pandemic). The recording of the premiere is available online. David Lancaster presented a talk preceding the premiere performance, and included The Dark Gate in a composer lecture at York St John University on 10th February 2020.

Publication: The Dark Gate (score) was published by University of York Music Press in January 2019.



1
On summer evenings
the blue mists rise
From streams, and hang trembling
Among evening whispers.

At the edges of forests
Young girls sit alone
Their hair hanging loose
Weeping tears over nothing

2
How can I see you love
Standing alone
Amid storms of grief
Without feeling my heart shake (tremble)

A deep night
Blacker than the blackness of your eyes
Has fallen silently
On the world

And is touching your hair.

Come,
My hand will clasp your dreaming
Hand
And I shall lead you between the nights,
Through the pale mists of childhood.

3
An autumn day will breathe.
With a pale, trembling hand
It will slowly strip the black dress
From your sleeping village.

In front of your white house
The naked linden will stand
Sadly swaying.

I shall return, lonely,
Out of the night
Bow gently to her and say:
Take my greeting to your mistress.

But you
Will go on softly sleeping on your bed.

4
With gentle fingers
The rain is softly
Playing sad melodies
On the black instrument of night.

Now we are sitting in darkness,
Each in their own house
Listening to the rain
Telling our sorrow.

For we have no more words.
Our feet have been leadened
By day.
There is no dance
Left in them.

5
There is one last solitary coach about to leave.
Let us get in and go,
For it won't wait.

I have seen young girls going softly
With sad faces
That look ashamed and sorry
Like purple sunsets.

And chubby pink children
Who went simply
Because they were called.

And I've seen men
Who stepped proud and straight through the streets of the world,
Far and wide,
They too got in calmly
And left.

And we are the last.
Day is declining.
The last, solitary coach is about to leave.
Let us too get in quietly
And go,
For it won't wait.

Concert performance and programme notes

The Dark Gate (2017, World Premier)

This music sets five poems by David Vogel (1891-1944) which are sung without a break:

1. On Summer Evenings
2. How Can I See You Love
3. An Autumn Day will Breathe
4. With Gentle Fingers
5. There is One Last Solitary Coach about to Leave

In his work and life Vogel was always an outsider. In Vienna (during WWI) he was imprisoned as a Russian subject; he subsequently adopted Austrian nationality then emigrated to Palestine before returning to settle in Paris. At the outbreak of WWII Vogel was arrested in France as an Austrian subject; on the Nazi invasion of France he was released and then re-arrested as a Jew before being transported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1944.

Link to full programme: https://1drv.ms/b/s!AlqMggwUEbS9mGkOL_Lvr7UKJNIQ?e=p2T4O8

Score and Recording

Link to recording

https://1drv.ms/u/s!AlqMggwUEbS9mFmtacwd8l_hGm8G?e=6wpk6u

Link to score

https://1drv.ms/b/s!AlqMggwUEbS9mFaIA--2UHLfCLLC?e=PlYYri

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