

VOYAGES
BENJAMIN C.S. BOYLE
ROBERT CONVERY



THE CROSSING
DONALD NALLY

VOYAGES (1994) Robert Convery

1. I 3:19
2. II 3:12
3. III 4:02
4. IV 5:17
5. V 4:29
6. VI 5:55

VOYAGES, CANTATA No. 2, Op. 41 (2018) Benjamin C.S. Boyle

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The Crossing

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Donald Nally,
conductor
John Grecia,
keyboards

Voyages String Ensemble

Natasha Colkett, Alexandra Cutler-Fetkewicz, Abigail Fayette,
Rebecca Harris, Margaret Humphrey, and Christof Richter, violin
Petula Perdakis and Daniela Pierson , viola
Tom Kraines and Mimi Morris-Kim, violoncello
Tim Ressler, contrabass

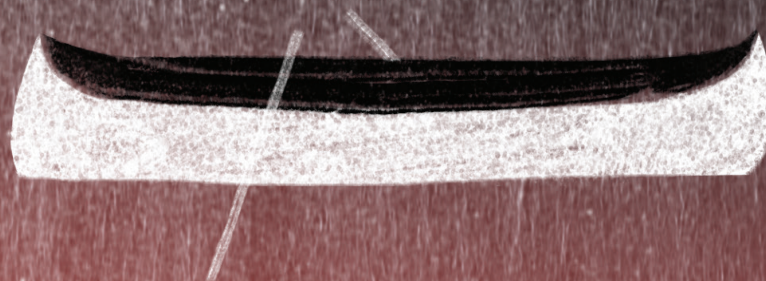
Album artwork by Paul du Coudray

¹ mezzo-soprano solo in Boyle II

² tenor solo in Boyle IVa, IVb

³ baritone solo in Boyle IVb

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THE JOURNEY TO VOYAGES

a note from Donald Nally

I spent a significant amount of time in the nineties obsessed with all things Hart Crane, his fantastic imagery, strictly disciplined structure, free-wheeling language, and complex world of metaphor. It held such great appeal for me, as I felt my own Romantic impulses breaking under the pressure of a desire for an ascetic aesthetic – my journey toward the austere, out of the florid. For me, it started with Crane's epic poem *The Bridge*, in which he acknowledges his great debt to his predecessor, his unknowing mentor. Crane's homage is not so much laudatory as it is an imagined intimacy, a luminous devotion, love.

Recorders ages hence, yes, they shall hear
In their own veins uncanceled thy sure tread
And read thee by the aureole 'round thy head
Of pasture-shine, Panis Angelicus!
Yes, Walt,
Afoot again, and onward without halt, —
Not soon, nor suddenly, — no, never to let go
My hand
in yours,
Walt Whitman —
so —

From *The Bridge*, I moved backward in time to Crane's first volume, *White Buildings*, where I discovered *Voyages*. Enamored by this cycle, I asked Bob Convery to set one of its poems, the third, in which, after trekking through breathtaking symbols and alliterative wonders – “infinite consanguinity,” “whirling pillars and lithe pediments,” “the silken skilled transmem-berment of song” – Crane concludes with a startlingly simple supplication:

Permit me voyage, love, into your hands...

Bob also fell in love with *Voyages* – so much so, he suggested setting the entire six-poem cycle. This was an uncalculated gift, the first major work to be inspired by one of my choirs (in this case, that of West Chester University).

Twenty-two years later, Benjamin Boyle, unaware of this history, mentioned Crane's cycle as a possible text for a new commission. I paused. The idea of a new setting of the same text brought to mind how the world has changed since 1994 when Bob finished his *Voyages*. How I have changed. How our perceptions can change. I thought of what I've learned about relationships, and what I have yet to learn. How we can share a perception and yet miss subtly nuanced differences that make us unique. How often we find our 'feeling' isn't completely understood. The Crossing has been exploring these differences in perception for a number of years now; how we view the emotional lives of others, how we consider The Other, how one Voice delivers the Voice of another. How we perceive emotional contexts can be the binding force of a community. It can also be what tears it apart. Hearing the same words inflated by very different composers of diverse perspectives, yet equal investment in this poetry, is an experiment and a rich opportunity that holds the potential for unforeseeable insight. We've found thousands of ways to sing "Lord, have mercy." What are two ways of finding the music in, "the bottom of the sea is cruel?" Or, imagining the sound world of the mystical,

In this expectant, still exclaim receive
The secret oar and petals of all love.

Crane was a complex person, and his words, like him, are simultaneously mesmerizing and confounding. It's easy to look at his pages and want to 'translate them,' to explain what each oblique metaphor and dissonant cluster may mean, to define the many obscure words. But, Crane lies at a curious place in American poetry, a Modernist working in lyricism, a strict Architect with metric discipline and prosaic gilding. Sounds, and what they evoke in us, are his concern. He was purposeful in his pursuits. Crane wrote, in reverence to *Voyages*:

The motivation of the poem must be derived from the implicit emotional dynamics of the materials used, and the terms of expression employed are often selected less for their logical (literal) significance than for their associational meanings. Via this and their metaphorical inter-relationships, the entire construction of the poem is raised on the organic principle of a "logic of metaphor," which antedates our so-called pure logic, and which is the general basis of all speech, hence consciousness and thought-extension.

Thus, we may not know exactly what a line means, but we recognize the feeling:

while ribboned water lanes I wind
Are laved and scattered with no stroke
Wide from your side

We sense we've been there and are returning. The Romantic pull and the Modernist friction come together to describe our journey.

And, indeed, *Voyages* is a journey – perhaps a number of journeys. Or, the same one looked at from various angles – how passion or compassion or hurt change from morning to night. Narrative, he said, is not his concern. The six poems of *Voyages* do not follow the course of a relationship linearly; instead, each poem is like a snapshot of a relationship in its entirety, as if zooming in and out on the erotic impulse, the fear, the companionship, the disappointment. We know this voyage has ended, we feel it from the first poem, and we sense a certain deepening resignation as the cycle proceeds, as if the memory of passion and pain is eroded by the waves that are thundering their warning in the opening lines. His words seem to capture the erosion of an instinct to love and, in this way, the cycle does work its way toward an inevitable conclusion.

Indeed, in the end, what is left is not the lover or the love, not the sea or the journey; it is the one thing that will, for Crane, always be there, even after he is gone: Words – the means by which he attempts to figure out all that has come before.

The imaged Word, it is, that holds
Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
It is the unbetrayable reply
Whose accent no farewell can know.

So, too, music, “whose accent no farewell can know,” tells its own stories. It leads us on journeys of unexpected clarity – surprising revelations found in an abstraction. A Language. An Art. Ancient and New. Here, two composers, one poem. A sea of perception and receiving, in which, perhaps, once again we will recognize ourselves and be grateful for whatever the days, and the nights, bring.

— Donald, May 2018

VOYAGES

music by Robert Convery (b. 1956)

Voyages was commissioned by Donald Nally and West Chester University in Pennsylvania. The work, for unaccompanied choir, is in six movements that correspond to the six poems of Hart Crane's *Voyages*. The six movements comprise a set of variations, in that the thematic material for each movement is drawn from its preceding movement. The six movements travel in a third degree harmonic progression beginning in A major and coming full circle at the end of the sixth movement. This cycle of poems by Hart Crane lives in the motion of a kaleidoscopic theme: the search for love and the self-knowledge attained in that search. The musical considerations for *Voyages* were made to correspond to that same kaleidoscopic center, the ever-growing changeability in understanding love, the single theme of Hart Crane's diversely symbolic cycle of poems.

— *Robert Convery*

|

Above the fresh ruffles of the surf
Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.
They have contrived a conquest for shell shucks,
And their fingers crumble fragments of baked weed
Gaily digging and scattering.
And in answer to their treble interjections
The sun beats lightning on the waves,
The waves fold thunder on the sand;
And could they hear me I would tell them:
O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,
Fondle your shells and sticks, bleached
By time and the elements; but there is a line
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

II

—And yet this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;
Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.
And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.
Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.
Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

III

Infinite consanguinity it bears—
This tendered theme of you that light
Retrieves from sea plains where the sky
Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones;
While ribboned water lanes I wind
Are laved and scattered with no stroke

And widening noon within your breast for gathering
All bright insinuations that my years have caught
For islands where must lead inviolably
Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes,—
In this expectant, still exclaim receive
The secret oar and petals of all love.

V

Meticulous, past midnight in clear rime,
Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast
Together in one merciless white blade—
The bay estuaries fleck the hard sky limits.
—As if too brittle or too clear to touch!
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.
One frozen trackless smile ... What words
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we
Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword
Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,
Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved
And changed ... "There's
Nothing like this in the world," you say,
Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look
Too, into that godless cleft of sky
Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.
"—And never to quite understand!" No,
In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

But now

Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
Draw in your head and sleep the long way home.

VI

Where icy and bright dungeons lift
 Of swimmers their lost morning eyes,
 And ocean rivers, churning, shift
 Green borders under stranger skies,
 Steadily as a shell secretes
 Its beating leagues of monotone,
 Or as many waters trough the sun's
 Red kelson past the cape's wet stone;
 O rivers mingling toward the sky
 And harbor of the phoenix' breast—
 My eyes pressed black against the prow,
 —Thy derelict and blinded guest
 Waiting, afire, what name, unspoke,
 I cannot claim: let thy waves rear
 More savage than the death of kings,
 Some splintered garland for the seer.
 Beyond siroccos harvesting
 The solstice thunders, crept away,
 Like a cliff swinging or a sail
 Flung into April's inmost day—
 Creation's blithe and petalled word
 To the lounged goddess when she rose
 Conceding dialogue with eyes
 That smile unsearchable repose—
 Still fervid covenant, Belle Isle,
 —Unfolded floating dais before
 Which rainbows twine continual hair—
 Belle Isle, white echo of the oar!
 The imaged Word, it is, that holds
 Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
 It is the unbetrayable reply
 Whose accent no farewell can know.

— *Hart Crane (1899-1932)*

VOYAGES, CANTATA No. 2, Op. 41

music by Benjamin C.S. Boyle (b. 1979)

Voyages is dedicated to Lindsey Reinhard

Commissioned by Debra Reinhard and Pamela Prior

I. Avowal: Bind us in time

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.

O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,

Bequeath us to no earthly shore until

Is answered in the vortex of our grave

The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

II. Seascape: Above the fresh ruffles of the surf

Above the fresh ruffles of the surf

Bright striped urchins flay each other with sand.

Gaily digging and scattering.

And in answer to their treble interjections

The sun beats lightning on the waves,

The waves fold thunder on the sand;

And could they hear me I would tell them:

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,

Fondle your shells and sticks

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Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses

Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.

The bottom of the sea is cruel.

III. Pairings: And yet this great wink of eternity

And yet this great wink of eternity,

Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,

Samite sheeted and processioned where

Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,

Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;
And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.
Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

IVa. Aria: This tendered theme of you
This tendered theme of you that light
Retrieves from sea plains where the sky
Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones;
While ribboned water lanes I wind
Are laved and scattered with no stroke
Wide from your side, whereto this hour
The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands.

IVb. Aria: And so, admitted through black swollen gates
And so, admitted through black swollen gates
That must arrest all distance otherwise,—
Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,
Light wrestling there incessantly with light,
Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
Your body rocking!
 and where death, if shed,
Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
The silken skilled transmemberment of song;
Permit me voyage, love, into your hands ...

V. Descent: Meticulous, infrangible, and lonely
Meticulous, past midnight in clear rime,
Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast
Together in one merciless white blade—
—As if too brittle or too clear to touch!
The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed,
Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.
One frozen trackless smile ... What words
Can strangle this deaf moonlight? For we
Are overtaken.

VI. Chorale: Draw in your head
Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
Draw in your head and sleep the long way home.

— Hart Crane (1899-1932)
abbreviated and rearranged by the composer





ROBERT CONVERY studied at The Curtis Institute of Music, Westminster Choir College, and The Juilliard School. His teachers were Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Gian Carlo Menotti, Vincent Persichetti and Richard Hundley. Commissioning grants include the National Endowment for the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and Opera America. Awards include the Charles E. Ives Award from The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, ASCAP Awards, and the Samuel Barber Award. Artist residencies include Yaddo, The Rockefeller Foundation's Study Center in Bellagio, Italy, and many colleges and universities throughout the United States. Some performances include The Philadelphia Orchestra, Virginia Symphony, Charleston Symphony, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., Festival Dei Due Mondi, Opera Verdi di Trieste, New York Festival of Song, The Aaron Copland Foundation at Merestead, Musica Sacra, The Crossing, and The Philadelphia Singers. His works are published with Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., E. C. Schirmer Music Publishing, earthsongs, inc., and Emerson Music. He is included in The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, as well as The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. His works include seven operas, thirty-eight cantatas, choral works of every description, twelve song cycles, and numerous chamber and orchestral works. Robert was born in Wichita, raised in San Francisco and, currently, resides in Long Island City, NY.



BENJAMIN C.S. BOYLE's work encompasses a large variety of genres including opera, orchestral music, chamber music, choral music, art songs, and works for piano. Major works have been championed by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Chicago Lyric Opera, Montreal Chamber Orchestra, the Kobe City Orchestra, The Crossing and many others the world over. In 2008, at the piano, he gave the US premiere of his Sonata-Fantasy with violinist Tim Fain at the Kennedy Center in Washington and Merkin Hall in New York. He is a First Prize winner of the Young Concert Artists international composition competition and the NATS Art Song Composition Competition. He is particularly noted for his composition of art songs. A compendium of these works (Complete Songs and Melodies 1998-2014) was published in 2016 by Rassel Editions.

Benjamin's formative studies were under the guidance of Dr. Philip Lasser of the Juilliard School. He was trained in the method of Nadia Boulanger and has been the Associate Director of the European American Musical Alliance and the EAMA Summer Institute in Paris, France since 2003. At the age of 25, Benjamin was the youngest person ever to receive a PhD in Composition from the University of Pennsylvania, after completing a M.M. from The Peabody Conservatory and a B.M. from the University of South Florida where he studied piano with Robert Helps.



THE CROSSING is a professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. It is committed to working with creative teams to make and record new, substantial works for choir that explore and expand ways of writing for choir, singing in choir, and listening to music for choir. Many of its over seventy commissioned premieres address social, environmental, and political issues.

Highly sought-after for collaborative projects, The Crossing's first such partnership was as the resident choir of the Spoleto Festival in Italy, in 2007. Since then, collaborators include the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), American Composers Orchestra, Network for New Music, Lyric Fest, PRISM Saxophone Quartet, Beth Morrison Projects, Pig Iron Theatre Company, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Mostly Mozart Festival, National Gallery of Art, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum, Institute for Advanced Study, Carnegie Hall, National Sawdust, and Northwestern University. The Crossing holds an annual residency at the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center in Big Sky, Montana.

With a commitment to recording its commissions, The Crossing has issued fifteen releases, receiving two Grammy Awards for Best Choral Performance (2018, 2019), and three Grammy nominations in as many years. The Crossing, with Donald Nally, was the American Composers Forum's 2017 Champion of New Music. They are the recipients of the 2015 Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, three ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, and the Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America.



DONALD NALLY conducts *The Crossing*, the internationally acclaimed, professional choir commissioning, premiering, and recording only new music. He holds the John W. Beattie Chair of Music at Northwestern University where he is professor and director of choral organizations. Donald has served as chorus master at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Welsh National Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and for many seasons at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. With *The Crossing*, Donald has commissioned nearly eighty works and produced fifteen recordings, with three Grammy nominations; he has won two Grammys for Best Choral Performance (2018, 2019). He was the American Composers Forum 2017 Champion of New Music and received the 2017 Michael Korn Founders Award from Chorus America. He is the only conductor to have two ensembles receive the Margaret Hillis Award for Excellence in Choral Music. In addition to his work with *The Crossing*, Donald has recently been visiting resident artist at the Park Avenue Armory, music director of David Lang's 1000-voice *Mile Long Opera* on the High Line in Manhattan, and chorus master for the New York Philharmonic's world premieres of works by Julia Wolfe and David Lang. He has worked closely with Lang and Allora & Calzadilla on projects in Osaka, London, Edmonton, Cleveland, and Philadelphia.

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