

FROM THE OTHER SKY <i>Experiencing compassion for the first time, a Zodiac Goddess loses her place in the heavens to share her musical powers with mankind.</i>	Duration: 18 min total	
	Principle Roles The Lark (Coloratura/Soprano), The Rat & The Crippled Woman (Mezzo-Sop.), The Rooster (Actor), The Monkey (Keyboards Soloist)	
	Instrumentation	Fl, Cl, Bsn, Hn, Tpt, Trbn, Tba, 3 Perc, Keyboard soloist: Hpsd/Cel/Pno, Strings.

a creative brief & a libretto **FROM THE OTHER SKY**

by **WANG JIE**

updated: August 2011

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About

FROM THE OTHER SKY is a multi-media concert opera based on the composer's short story of the same title. American Composers Orchestra had commissioned me a new work for 2010 season, and they asked that the new work reflect "Mystics and Magic". I felt necessary to intensify this theme with an original narrative of the mystical and magical power of music.

Set in 3 Scenes and a Postlude, FROM THE OTHER SKY is a fable on how the thirteen animals of the Chinese Zodiac (in the order of Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Pig and Lark) came to become twelve (the Lark doesn't exist in the Chinese Zodiac as we know it). The Lark is an accidental heroine (the Holy Fool in the tradition of Wagner's Parsifal) who saves the world unwittingly: as a result, not of what she does, but what is done to her.

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During the ACO performance, members of the orchestra were part of the cast. An Actor performed and interacted with the singers, soloist and orchestra members. A supertitle animation was projected as the backdrop of the scenes. The composer was casted as the Monkey, playing three keyboards: the Harpsichord, the Piano and the Celesta.

Brief Story

Thirteen Zodiac Animals (in the order of Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Pig, and Lark) live in their extravagant palace above the sky. From this remote distance, twelve of the animals install personalities in human newborns. The exception is the Lark, whose sole responsibility is to revere the Rat and entertain her fellow Zodiacs with music.

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The Lark performs highly virtuosic and entertaining repertoire, which pleases The Rat and his fellow Zodiacs. But The Rat hasn't been so pleased lately, because there have been fewer and fewer newborns. The lack of business has put the Zodiac gods to devastation. One day, the Rat summons the Lark to fly down to the human world and check out why.

Once there, the Lark discovers that a plague has broken out amongst the mankind. She then hears the voice of a crippled woman selling baby shoes that have never been worn. This song full of pain captures the Lark. She mimics the woman in order to learn the song. As she spends more time learning the sad song, her singing is now fueled by great compassion and deep soul. As her musical voice matures, her song miraculously heals the crippled woman and we see life installed in her renewed body. Shortly after she gains health, we see her enchanted by the Lark's singing and she falls in love with another human.

Upon the Lark's return to the palace, she reports the devastation to the Rat. The Rat and his fellows are morose about how the business has suffered but generally indifferent to the devastation in the human world. Instead, he persuades her to sing and entertain.

The Lark is at first singing her old routine. Little does she know, her singing is now gravitated towards the human song. This catches the Rat's attention: the Lark is not singing the music he likes to hear. "Too few notes", complains the Rat.

The Rat and the Rooster now both noticed that she has been contaminated by the human world which is literally and figuratively beneath them. The Rat fires the Lark.

The dark horror that was left from the plague has dissolved since the Lark's descend. Miracles of healing has taken place and humans begin new life.

This is how we are left with only twelve Zodiacs animals.

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F

irst Scene

A routine day at the Zodiac Palace. We find out through the Lark that new-borns have hit record low in the human world. The Rat sends the Lark down to find out why.

A few seconds of instrumental prelude, the Lark flies into the scene. She is delighted to see the extravagant food spread.

[THE LARK]

(off stage) YO! (On stage)Yoo-Hoo!
Peach, apples, pineapples;
Fat duck, crispy nut, lots of luck!
If you think
the Zodiac Palace is a fabulous place,
You've got it right!
No need to worship East,
If all you see is feast!
Endlessly mindless till the end of the mind!

If you think
Fabulous Gods toil at this place,
Think again!
Check out who's the boss!

The Rat (the immensely obese and ugly rat, the head of the Zodiac Gods) marches onto the stage. He is accompanied by the Rooster who's the Prime Minister. Hardly does the Rooster sit

him down, the Lark springs up to welcome the rat and performs her routine. Highly virtuosic music pierces our ears-drums.

[THE LARK]

Long live the Rat!
65 degrees Sunny as always.
New-borns' hit record low. Collapse!
Business worsens worse than ever.
But we've got nothing to worry about.
For the Rat is always right!

The Rat is obviously unhappy about the bad business. He stops the Lark and the music as the Rooster takes attendance.

[THE ROOSTER]

Snake!
The pianist snores into the microphone.

Horse!
An orchestra member lifts a sign that says "Pedicure"

Pig!
The Pianist solos Hard-Rock music on the

Harpisichord, while another orchestra member lifts a sign that says "Pilate".

[THE RAT]

Ugh - - - (very long sigh)

[THE ROOSTER] continues

Rabbit -
Rabbit?
Rabbit!!!

Harpisichord music continues with mysterious motives, while orchestra members lift signs that spells out as "Ya know... .."

[THE RAT] pounds the table angrily

But he soon turns morose and summons the music as if recovering from a bad hang over.

Ugh. Music, music!

As the Lark repeats the song, the Rooster takes out a sign also. It says "Bailout Plan!" The Rat pretends to think about it. But both of them looks at the Lark and an idea pops up. The Rat whispers something to the rooster.

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[THE LARK]

Long live the Rat!
Rat, rat! Go Rat!
Long live the Rat!
New-borns' hit record low.
Business worsens worse than ever.

But we've got nothing to worry about.

For the Rat is always right!

Everybody applauds the Lark's wonderful performance. As the instrumental music continues, the Rooster whispers the order that the Lark has been sent to the human world to find out what's causing the bad business.

[THE LARK]

Down to the human world I shall go!

Mission possible!

Here I go.

As if forgetting something, rush back to stage

Long live the Rat!

End of First Scene

I nstrumental Interlude & Second Scene

Instrumental music portrays a contrasting world from the Zodiac Palace. The Lark learns a sad song from a crippled woman.

[THE CRIPPLED WOMAN] and later [THE LARK]

For sale!

Baby shoes,

Never worn.

The Lark sees that a plague has taken over the human race. She is rather nauseated.

Sweet (is) a Mother's face

In the light of her (a?) baby's voice

Until that heartbeat is taken.

The sad song from the crippled woman captures the Lark.

Baby shoes,

For sale!

Fragrant a lover's trace,

In the gleam of her lips,

Until the pulse is broken.

Earth frozen

Sky shut

The lips of a faded life

Pale, grey, frosted

Little arms forever folded

Fallen

For sale!

Baby shoes,

For sale!

The deserts moan.

Moaning for the bones thrown,

Each now but a grain of sand.

Forever. Forgotten.

As the Lark learns her song from the crippled woman, a Grim Reaper shows up on the stage (actor). He walks by the crippled but she didn't smell ready for him. He walks around the musi-

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cians and fishes the bassoon player out of the orchestra instead.

him. He lost interest in the bassoon player and pardons him.

At the end of the scene, the Crippled Woman heals from the Lark's beautiful music. She throws away her walkers. As the Lark finishes the song, the Grim Reaper has fallen madly in love with the once Crippled Woman.

As he walks pass the duet the second time, the Lark has learned the song and her voice stuns

So the bassoon player goes back to the orchestra. The Grim Reaper become the Lark's biggest fan and follows her around like a groupie.

T hird Scene

The Lark returns to the Zodiac Palace with the tragic news about the plague. The Rat discovers that she is no longer capable of singing music that pleases his taste. The Lark is deemed "Contaminated" and let go to the human world forever.

[THE LARK]

Plague! (off stage) A plague has risen! (On stage)

Men are not mating.

No one is interested in mating.

A teacher's voice, as if explaining sex for the first time in high school Health Class.

No mating, no babies!

No men are interested in mating.

Some are busy digging.

Some are busy burning.

Some are busy dying.

No mating, no babies!

[THE RAT] Interrupts angrily

Enough, enough! Unacceptable!

But he soon turns morose and summons the music

Ugh. Music, music!

[THE LARK]

Long live the Rat!

Sixty five degrees sunny as always.

Plague or no plague,

We've got nothing to worry about.

For the Rat is always right!

Plague or no plague,

Pulse or no pulse,

Riven, Stricken, frozen, broken, taken, fallen.

forgotten!

As the Lark slips into the song she learned from

the crippled woman, the Rooster and the Rat both sense that something has changed about her.

A moaning desert weeps alone.

Moans for the bones thrown,

Each now but a grain of sand.

Gone.

The Lark finishes the song, orchestra members lift signs with scores: "10! 9.5! -1! 8! Bravo! Sucks!" The Rat whispers to the Rooster. Rooster replicates a scene from Amadeus.

[THE RAT] Interrupts by pounding the table

Unacceptable!

[THE ROOSTER]

Eh, too few notes.

The Rat calls for the Rooster and whispers to him.

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[THE ROOSTER] Announces

You are contaminated.

*Suddenly realizes the word “contaminated” and
grossed out*

Contaminated? Ewww!!

*The Rat whispers to the Rooster again. And this
time, Rooster clears his throat and imitates
Donald Trump:*

[THE ROOSTER]

You are fired!

She composes herself again

That's Fine!

[THE LARK]

What???

You, you, you, you.....and you!

*She points at the Rat, Rooster, the Conductor,
the Monkey, the Concert Master*

All of you, animals, are deaf!

Postlude

Now that the Lark sings for the Humans, they are quickly recovering from the plague.

*The once crippled woman is dressed in festive
style, standing next to the once Grim Reaper.
She is holding their baby.*

[THE LARK]

Eat, drink, man, woman,

Live, Mate, oh, lots of babies.

The Hell with the Rat!