

VOICE INTRODUCTION AND REPERTOIRE

Introduction



~It has been my life's work for more than 30 years to seek and to celebrate heroes in one way or another, either with the harp and a recitation of myth or verse, with the written word, or with my activities as the founder and Executive Director of an educational non-profit, The Arete Fund, established 20 years ago. Locally, Arete supports the efforts of deserving high school seniors who aspire to attend college or trade school. Globally, a priority has been to defend our shared humanity in a time of religious strife with humanitarian projects and cultural outreach. It is Arete's goal in 2018 to move more forcefully on behalf of the education of women in developing nations. It is my own personal and artistic goal to serve Arete's mission by telling an old story in the way that ancient stories were once told. To this end, I have created VOICE – a performance piece that recreates for a contemporary audience the ancient art of praise song at the harp. The story I wish to tell is perhaps one of the oldest of all stories as it begins in Sumer in the 3rd millennium B.C., in Ur, later the birthplace of Abraham. It is a story that encompasses myth from the cradle of civilization and sacred verse from the Holy lands. It is a story that gives emphasis to the themes of love and war while highlighting the voices of women, the voices of praise, faith and struggle that have come down to us from the earliest days of recorded history. This story is a lament in the sense that we are obliged to mourn the loss of human life as a result of the religious intolerance of our day. Otherwise, it is my hope to reacquaint a contemporary audience with the art of praise song and to render this lament for our millennium as something of shared spiritual legacy and our inheritance as human beings. It is both to further the work of Arete and to achieve my artistic goal that I invite you to listen to the following recitation of verse that I have committed to memory.



Our story begins in the cradle of civilization in the 3rd millennium B.C., in Ur, later the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham who is revered by Christians, Muslims and Jews alike. Part I involves recitation and song excerpted from ancient Sumerian hymns, mythology and text from the ancient Middle East while Part II involves a recitation of verse and song from the Old Testament, namely the victory song of Deborah and the story of Jephthah's daughter from Judges.

During a brief intermission, I will recite my own praise poem for those mothers who have lost children due to the religious intolerance of our time, and both parts I and II conclude with my own praise poetry.

As one of the oldest of instruments, the harp has been used as an instrument of praise song for 5,000 years, and the oldest known harp is the bull-headed harp of lapis lazuli from the birthplace of Abraham in Ur where our story begins. One might well ask *why* I wish to tell such a story at this time. There is a verse from Genesis about Abraham *who died an old man and full of years with his people gathered unto him; And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave at Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite*. If these sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, grew up to become the fathers of the Hebrew and Arab people respectively, then we might well imagine what passed between them in the cave in light of the bloodshed and religious wars in our time. It is because I, too, wonder at the ways that Isaac and Ishmael might have acknowledged their brotherhood or given comfort to the other with a word or gesture, that I have composed this recitation as I have, and compiled and arranged from this story of *ours* a lament for their descendants and the ongoing loss of innocent life in the name of our Creator. A lament for those who dwell in the midst of perpetual conflict and for those of us who are sidelined with helplessness and despair. In light of the struggles ahead, I dedicate my recitation of these voices of faith and hope to the memory of our dead, to those Christian, Jewish and Muslim innocents who have suffered and continue to suffer, and to their families with my deepest respect.

Repertoire

VOICE: A CALL FOR GREATER RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

Recitation and harp by Dianne Tittle de Laet

Musical Production by Chris Comozzi

*"...And Abraham died an old man and full of years with his people gathered unto him.
And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave at Machpelah
In the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite."*

From the Old Testament

Sisters

They are listening.
There are shouts outside the cave and they are frightened.
They are distracted from their devotions, their grief.
Centuries are passing
And still, the brothers must finish what they came to do.
They must honor their father, each other
They must hold to their moment
And endure what time will tell of them, their brotherhood;
Endure the future cries of the unborn from Damascus
The silence of the unborn from Syria
the Holocaust
the plight of the Palestinians
Withstand the whiplash of years to come and all the snarling rage of men
because the holy quiet of the cave where they have come
to bury their father
demands it.

~For the moments between them and the sorrow shared
For brothers, Isaac and Ishmael,
And all their descendants
To this day

I dedicate this recitation of verse

PART I: Mythology and Verse from the Ancient Middle and Near East

“In the course of the third millennium B.C. the Sumerians developed religious ideas and spiritual concepts which have left an indelible impress on the modern world, especially by way of Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. On the intellectual level Sumerian thinkers and sages, as a result of their speculation on the origin and nature of the universe...evolved a cosmology and theology which carried such high conviction that they became the basic creed and dogma of much of the ancient Near East....”

From **The Sumerians**, by Samuel Noah Kramer, page 112

From Lebanon, the very beautiful paragraph about religious tolerance from an essay written in the pre-Christian era by Maximus of Tyre ((Text from **The Five Stages of Greek Religion** by Gilbert Murray)

Sung verse from the Babylonian Genesis Story, the Enuma Elish

Hymn to Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: from Ur in ancient Sumer

(Text from **Inanna** by Diane Wolkstein and Noah Kramer)

In a reference to the All Mother who announces herself to the hero of Apuleius' novel, *The Golden Ass*: *I am nature, the universal mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of heaven, the wholesome sea breezes, the lamentable silence of the gods below....”*

From a Lament to Tammuz

The prophet Ezekiel was said to have heard women lamenting for Tammuz at the gates of Jerusalem. Such laments were common throughout the ancient Middle East and recall a time of ritual mourning for the annual death of the vegetative god Tammuz or Adonis, or Damuzi. (Text from Frazier's **Golden Bough**)

Sung verse from ancient Sumerian Hymn: *We were born of thee: the mother loves us in her heart* (Text from the music library at the University of California, Berkeley, California)

Hymn to The Stars: Sumer-Akkad

This ancient hymn gives voice to one who bears witness to the passing of the ancient gods who were the forbearers of our own experience of divinity.

(Text from **Technicians of the Sacred**: compiled by Jerome Rothenberg)

In Response: *I, Inanna, Queen of Heaven, with news from Southern Iraq* by D.T. deLaet

Love Poem, Ancient Egypt

Intermission

Magdalene's Magnificat for Mary at Golgotha by D.T. de Laet

PART II. Sacred Verse from the Old Testament

Victory Song of Deborah from Judges

A prophetess, Deborah was the only Judge of Israel who was a woman. Her song commemorates the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites under their King Jabin, and his Assyrian general, Sisera.

(Deborah's song of victory is from the Book of Yahweh and is recited in its entirety.)

The Story of Jephthah's Daughter

Jephthah was another of Israel's judges. His daughter was the martyred heroine Who was sacrificed after Jephthah's victory in battle against the children of Ammon.

(I have omitted only that verse from the King James version of the Bible that concerns the land held in dispute between the Israelites and the Ammonites.)

Song on the Mountain

We are not given the name of Jephthah's Daughter in the Old Testament telling of this story and neither are we given to know anything about her experience on the mountain where she went to "lament." In praise of Jephthah's Daughter, I have attempted to give voice to her experience on the mountain with a song of faith composed with a weaving of sacred verse from the Hebrew *Song at Daybreak*, Job, The Song of Songs and psalms.

In response: *Jerusalem 2000: A Lament for Jephthah's Daughter in Our Millennium* by D.T. de Laet.

END