

John Oliver

Raven Steals the Light

for orchestra
or narrator and orchestra

johnolivermusic.com

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Raven Steals the Light was co-commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Music in the Morning and first performed by the CBC Radio Orchestra conducted by Jacques Lacombe on May 3, 1999 at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

INSTRUMENTATION

2 flutes (flute 2 doubles piccolo)
oboe
English horn
2 clarinets in B
2 bassoons

French horn
trumpet in C

Percussion (1 player):
ratchet,
3 suspended cymbals,
1 large tam-tam,
high woodblock,
xylophone,
tambourine,
large ceremonial Haida drum (or other First Nations ceremonial drum),
bass drum

timpani
piano

strings

OPTIONAL (but recommended)

Narrator
1 to 3 contemporary (not traditional) dancers, preferably First Nations, portraying the roles of Raven, Grandfather, and the daughter.

When narrator's text appears inside a box, it occurs during fermata or silence in the orchestra. When not enclosed within a box, the speech occurs over top of musical accompaniment.

PROGRAM NOTE

My composition sets the story of The Raven Steals the Light, as told and illustrated by Bill Reid in a book of Native American tales of the same name, which he co-wrote with Robert Bringhurst. The music begins with the 'inky pitchy blackness double fugue' (the world before light). Raven bumbles around in the dark, to eventually discover a house with no windows or doors. Inside he hears an old man who says, 'I have a box and inside the box is another box and inside it are many more boxes, and in the smallest box of all is all the light of the world.' Raven decide he wants the light, but he can't find a way into the house, so he goes upstream to make a plan. He decides to transform himself into a hemlock needle to travel downstream until he reaches the place where the old man's daughter collects water. She will collect water at the moment Raven arrives (as hemlock needle). Then she will drink from the bucket and swallow Raven. Raven will go to her womb. The daughter will go home and Raven will be born inside the house as Raven-boy.

After much stumbling around (in the dark, remember), he will find the box of boxes with light in the smallest one. He will cajole the old man to open the boxes, against his will, one by one, until a strange light is cast. When he opens the last box, the old man picks up the ball of light and tosses it like a toy to Raven-boy who, at that instant, transforms himself back into the big black Raven. In the newly found light, the old man barely glimpses his grandson as the boy's mouth becomes a beak and catches the light and Raven flies up out of the house through the smoke-hole.

As Raven flies into the sky, everything below is lit up, but, as Raven can now see, so can his predator, Eagle. Eagle chases Raven., Raven swerves to avoid Eagle, and in doing so, drops half the light, which breaks on the rocks below into one big piece and thousands of tiny pieces that bounce back into the night sky to become today's moon and stars. Finally, tired of the chase, Raven drops the last piece of light on the horizon, creating the sun. The eternal Raven escapes the jaws of the Eagle and goes on to find food and new adventures in his newly illuminated world. The composition ends with the transformation of the world by light.

Commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Music in the Morning
Dedicated to June Goldsmith and Bill Reid

Raven Steals the Light

John Oliver
1999, revised 2014

This story takes place mainly in the dark. Inky, pitchy, all-consuming dark, blacker than a thousand stormy winter midnights, blacker than anything anywhere has been since."

Square fermata indicates hold while narrator speaks. Ignore them when no narrator.

When performed with narrator, repeat this bar to allow completion of text.

4/4 = 48
medium-soft mallet

Bass Drum

Piano

Narrator

Violoncello, desk 1

Violoncello, desk 2

Double Bass 1

Double Bass 2

4/4 = 48
free bowing

poco accel.

on the keys with fists.

Whether she was as beautiful as hemlock fronds against the spring sky at sunrise or as ugly as a sea slug doesn't really matter very much to this story, which takes place mainly in the dark. Because at that time the whole world was dark. Inky, pitchy, all-consuming dark, blacker than a thousand stormy winter midnights, [blacker than anything anywhere has been since.]

Before there was anything, before the great flood had covered the earth and receded, before the animals walked the earth or the trees covered the land or the birds flew between the trees, even before the fish and the whales and seals swam in the sea, an old man lived in a house on the bank of a river with his only child, a daughter.

10
4/4 = 60

B. D.

Pno.

Narrator

The reason for all this blackness has to do with the old man in the house by the river. He had a box which contained a box which contained a box...

4/4 = 60
Meter for Vc. 1 only

Vc., d.1

Vc., d.2

Db.1

Db.2

13

B. D.

Pno.

Narrator

which contained an infinite number of boxes each nestled in a box slightly larger than itself.

Vla., d.1

Vla., d.2

Vc., d.1

Vc., d.2

Db.1

Db.2

15 2/4

B. D.

Pno.

Narrator

Finally there was a box so small all it could contain was all the light in the universe.

Meter for Vn. I, 1 only
12/8
8/4

2/4

Vin. I, d.1

Vin. I, d.2

Vin. I, d.3

Vin. I, d.4

Vin. II, d.1

Vin. II, d.2

Vin. II, d.3

Vla., d.1

Vla., d.2

Vc., d.1

Vc., d.2

Db.1

Db.2

18 $\frac{4}{4}$

B. D.

Pno.

Narrator

Vln. I, d.1 $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{123}{843}$

Vln. I, d.2

Vln. I, d.3

Vln. I, d.4

Vln. II, d.1 solo

Vln. II, d.2 solo

Vln. II, d.3

Vla., d.1

Vla., d.2

Vc., d.1 $\frac{321}{843}$

Vc., d.2

Db.1

Db.2

Musical score for orchestra and narrator, measures 21-44. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet 1 and 2, Bassoon 1 and 2, and Bass Drum. The second system includes parts for Violin I (1, 2, 3, 4), Violin II (1, 2, 3), Viola (1, 2), Violoncello (1, 2), and Double Bass (1, 2). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The time signature changes from 2/4 to 4/4. A circled measure number '21' is at the top left. A large watermark 'GEM' is visible across the page.

This page of a musical score contains the following parts and staves:

- Flutes:** Fl. 1 and Fl. 2
- Woodwinds:** Oboe (Ob.)
- Eng. Hn.:** English Horn
- Clarinets:** Cl. 1 and Cl. 2
- Bassoons:** Bsn. 1 and Bsn. 2
- Percussion:** B. D. (Bass Drum)
- Narrator:** A section with no musical notation.
- Violins:** Violin I (Vln. I, d.1, d.2, d.3, d.4) and Violin II (Vln. II, d.1, d.2, d.3)
- Violas:** Viola I (Vla., d.1) and Viola II (Vla., d.2)
- Violoncellos:** Vc., d.1 and Vc., d.2
- Double Basses:** Db. 1 and Db. 2

The score is written in 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. It includes various musical notations such as dynamics (f, mf, pp), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (trills, triplets). The woodwinds and strings play complex rhythmic patterns, while the double basses provide a steady accompaniment.

A

26

Fl.1

Fl.2

Ob.

Eng. Ha.

Cl.1

Cl.2

Bsn.1

Bsn.2

B. D.

Narrator

Vln. I, d.1

Vln. I, d.2

Vln. I, d.3

Vln. I, d.4

Vln. II, d.1

Vln. II, d.2

Vln. II, d.3

Vla., d.1

Vla., d.2

Vc., d.1

Vc., d.2

Db.1

Db.2

mp *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f*

ff *p* *f* *p*

pizz. *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f*

ff *p* *f* *p*

4/4 4/4 2/4

833 848 321 848

B

29

4/4

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob.

Eng. Ha.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

B. D.

Narrator

B

4/4

Vln. I, d.1

Vln. I, d.2

Vln. I, d.3

Vln. I, d.4

Vln. II, d.1

Vln. II, d.2

Vln. II, d.3

Vla., d.1

Vla., d.2

Vc., d.1

Vc., d.2

Db. 1

Db. 2

Bumbling around in total darkness.

C

Fl.1
Fl.2
Ob.
Eng. Hrn.
Cl.1
Cl.2
Bsn.1
Bsn.2
Hrn.
C.Tpt.
T-t.
B. D.
Timp.

Detailed description: This section of the score covers measures 33 to 36. It features woodwinds and percussion. Flutes 1 and 2, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinets 1 and 2, Bassoons 1 and 2, Horns, and Trumpets are mostly silent. The Trombones (T-t.) and Bass Drum (B. D.) play rhythmic patterns. The Timpani (Timp.) has a few notes. Dynamics include *ff*, *mf*, *mp*, and *ff*. A section marker 'C' is present at the beginning.

C

Vln. I, d.1
Vln. I, d.2
Vln. I, d.3
Vln. I, d.4
Vln. II, d.1
Vln. II, d.2
Vln. II, d.3
Vla., d.1
Vla., d.2
Vc., d.1
Vc., d.2
Db.1
Db.2

continuous glissando

arco

Detailed description: This section of the score covers measures 33 to 36 for the string ensemble. It includes Violins I (d.1-4), Violins II (d.1-3), Violas (d.1-2), Violas (d.1-2), Violas (d.1-2), Cellos (d.1-2), and Double Basses (d.1-2). The strings play melodic and harmonic lines with various dynamics such as *ff*, *mf*, *mp*, and *ff*. Some parts include 'continuous glissando' and 'arco' markings. A section marker 'C' is present at the beginning.

D Raven's Cry out of the darkness.

Narrator: long speech.

38

Fl.1
Fl.2
Ob.
Eng. Hrn.
Cl.1
Cl.2
Bsn.1
Bsn.2
Hrn.
C.Tpt.
T.1
B.D.
Timp.
Pno.

The Raven, who of course existed at that time, because he had always existed and always would, was somewhat less than satisfied with this state of affairs, since it led to an awful lot of blundering around and bumping into things. (Cont'd below.)

D

Vin. I, d.1
Vin. I, d.2
Vin. I, d.3
Vin. I, d.4
Vin. II, d.1
Vin. II, d.2
Vin. II, d.3
Vla., d.1
Vla., d.2
Vc., d.1
Vc., d.2
Db.1
Db.2

It slowed him down a good deal in his pursuit of food and other fleshly pleasures, and in his constant effort to interfere and to change things. Eventually, his bumping around in the dark took him close to the home of the old man. He first heard a little singsong voice muttering away. When he followed the voice, he soon came to the wall of the house, and there, placing his ear against the planking, he could just make out the words, "I have a box and inside the box is another box and inside it are many more boxes, and in the smallest box of all is all the light in the world, and it is all mine and I'll never give any of it to anyone, not even to my daughter, because who knows, she may be as homely as a sea slug, and neither she nor I would like to know that."

E Raven hears the Old Man's
singsong voice.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 44 to 58. It begins with a key signature of one flat and a 2/4 time signature. A rehearsal mark 'E' is placed above measure 48, with the text 'Raven hears the Old Man's singsong voice.' in a box. The score includes parts for Flute 1 & 2, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Horns, Trumpets (T-1, B.D.), Trombones (B.D.), Timpani, and Piano. The second system covers measures 59 to 72 and includes parts for Violins I & II, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses. Dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, and *sf* are used throughout. A large, faint watermark 'Sibelius' is visible across the page.

Raven hops around the house.

49

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for Flute 1 & 2, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet 1 & 2, Bassoon 1 & 2, Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Timpani, and Piano. The second system includes staves for Violin I (1-4), Violin II (1-3), Viola (1-2), Violoncello (1-2), and Double Bass (1-2). The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of dynamics including *ff*, *f*, *mf*, and *arco*. The piece concludes with a *ff* dynamic marking.

53

Fl. 1 *fp* narrator version

Fl. 2 *fp* narrator version

Ob. *fp* narrator version

Eng. Hn. *fp* narrator version

Cl. 1 all notes very short!

Cl. 2 all notes very short!

Bsn. 1 all notes very short!

Bsn. 2 all notes very short!

Hrn. *fp* narrator version

C.Tpt. *fp* narrator version

T. T. *mf*

B. D. *mf*

Timp. *mf* *ff* *mf*

Pno. Black and white keys *fff* *mezzo* *secco!* *secco!* *secco!*

Narrator *mf*

Raven circled the house, looking for a door,
but all he found was a smooth, unbroken barrier.

Vln. I, d.1 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. I, d.2 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. I, d.3 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. I, d.4 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. II, d.1 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. II, d.2 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln. II, d.3 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln., d.1 all notes very short! *fff*

Vln., d.2 all notes very short! *fff*

Vc., d.1 all notes very short! *fff*

Vc., d.2 all notes very short! *fff*

Db. 1 all notes very short! *fff*

Db. 2 all notes very short! *fff*

Raven circles the house, looking for an entrance. "But no matter how many times he circled it, or how carefully he felt the planking, it remained a smooth, unbroken barrier."

56 **F**

Fl. 1/2
Ob.
Eng. Hn.
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
Bsn. 1&2
Hrn.
Pno.
Vln. I, d.1
Vln. I, d.2
Vln. I, d.3
Vln. I, d.4
Vln. II, d.1
Vln. II, d.2
Vln. II, d.3
Vla., d.1
Vla., d.2
Vcl., d.1
Vcl., d.2
Db. 1
Db. 2

57

Fl. 1/2
Ob.
Eng. Hn.
Bsn. 1&2
Hrn.
C Tpt.

Vln. I, d.1
Vln. I, d.2
Vln. I, d.3
Vln. I, d.4
Vln. II, d.1
Vln. II, d.2
Vln. II, d.3
Vla., d.1
Vla., d.2
Vc., d.1
Vc., d.2
Db.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 57 and 58. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes woodwinds (Flute 1/2, Oboe, English Horn, Bassoon 1&2, Horn, and Trumpet in C) and strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass). The woodwinds have long, sustained notes with some grace notes. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with many notes marked with a hairpin symbol (12) indicating dynamics. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

58

Fl. 1/2
Ob.
Eng. Hn.
Bsn. 1&2
Hrn.
C Tpt.

Vln. I, d.1
Vln. I, d.2
Vln. I, d.3
Vln. I, d.4
Vln. II, d.1
Vln. II, d.2
Vln. II, d.3
Vla., d.1
Vla., d.2
Vc., d.1
Vc., d.2
Db.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 59 and 60. The instrumentation is the same as in the previous block. The woodwinds continue with their sustained notes. The string section plays a more active rhythmic pattern, primarily consisting of eighth notes, with dynamic markings (12) throughout. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic.