

TWINGE

"For the earth, it was just a twinge. But for people -- who mark the calendar in days and months rather than eons -- a monumental catastrophe had begun, not only the largest earthquake in 40 years but also the displacement of billions of tons of water, unleashing a series of mammoth waves: a tsunami..."



Photo credit: Chris Hutcheson

TWINGE (2016)

(Soprano, clarinet, piano, narrator)

by Jon Magnussen, text by Barry Bearak

Program Length: 60 minutes

Scored for soprano, piano and clarinet, TWINGE was written especially for HAVEN. Composer Jon Magnussen adapted the text for TWINGE from Barry Bearak's New York Times Magazine November 27, 2005 cover story, "The Day the Sea Came". The Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program provided funding for TWINGE with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Chamber Music America Endowment Fund. The work is dedicated to the memories of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the December 26, 2004 Indonesian tsunami.

"For the earth, it was just a twinge. Last Dec. 26, at 7:59 a.m., one part of the planet's undersea crust made an abrupt shift beneath another along a 750-mile seam near the island of Sumatra. The tectonic plates had been grating against each other for millenniums, and now the higher of the two was lifted perhaps 60 feet. For a planet where landmasses are in constant motion across geological time, the event was of no great moment. But for people -- who mark the calendar in days and months rather than eons -- a monumental catastrophe had begun, not only the largest earthquake in 40 years but also the displacement of billions of tons of water, unleashing a series of mammoth waves: a tsunami..."

— Barry Bearak, in "The Day the Sea Came", The New York Times, November 27, 2005 © 2005 The New York Times. All rights reserved.

Composer Jon Magnussen elaborates:

On Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2005, I read Barry Bearak's cover story article in the New York Times Magazine, "The Day The Sea Came". After reading, I just wanted to be quiet for a time. Bearak's moving account of six survivors from the December 26, 2004 Indonesian tsunami was so beautiful – at once full of humanity, tragedy and, ultimately, hope. The tsunami had wreaked havoc on a land so far away, and yet I felt an almost familial closeness with the survivors. Over the next decade, I shared the story with friends in the music world to kindle interest in a musical collaboration inspired by the stories. Finally, in 2014, Kim, Lindsay, and Midori of Haven Trio asked me to write a new work for them. They were excited at my suggestion to base the work on Bearak's article.

From Bearak's story, I assembled the texts for fifteen songs, choosing them for the variety of stories they told, and for the beauty and precision of their language. While the heaviness of human tragedy was a constant presence in Bearak's story, his clear-eyed portrayals of the survivor's experience brought a wide range of human emotions to the reader, including humor, joy, and yearning. My intention in setting these texts to music was to honor the memory of those who had passed in the tsunami, as well as honor the resilient spirits of those who had survived and carried on. The stories told in TWINGE, then, are those of Jaloe (Around Eight), Romi (The Rich), Haikal (I Look to the West; The Discovery Chanel), Faridah (The Water is Warm; This is Not the End; The Matchmaker), and Maisara (My Heaven; This is the House; There is a Homemade Sign). Some of the texts also took a narrator's voice (Billions, Some Live, The Lighthouse, Vast).

I composed the fifteen songs over a two-month period in early summer 2016, and met with the musicians in early August for a short workshop period. In setting the words to music, I allowed a variety of influences to pervade the work. My own musical voice is an omnivorous one, inclusive of many concert music influences as well as other popular music genres and styles. In regards to the ordering of the songs, I composed the songs knowing that a different ordering of the songs may be needed at times, or perhaps a subset, to adapt to different performance circumstances.

"...And yet inevitably, survivors cannot help wondering how God's hand might have directed events differently. They revisit their memories of that morning, how violently the ground shook, how mercilessly the sea invaded, how densely tragedy contaminated the city. The suddenness still astonishes them. After all, it had begun as such an ordinary Sunday."

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Jon Magnussen's music has been described as "hauntingly beautiful" (Salt Lake Tribune), "beautifully textured" (New York Times), and "thoughtful... deeply imaginative" (L.A. Times). Composed for the concert hall, drama, dance and film, his music has been commissioned and performed nationally and internationally by organizations including American Ballet Theatre, American Composers Orchestra, Chamber Music Hawai'i, Ebb and Flow Arts, ETHEL (string quartet), Haven Trio, Hawai'i Youth Opera Chorus, Hawaii Youth Symphony, The Juilliard School, Limón Dance Company (NYC), Lula Washington Dance Theatre, New York New Music Ensemble, New Juilliard Ensemble, New York Percussion Quartet, New York Virtuoso Singers, The Shakespeare Theatre (Washington, D.C.), and St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble. His compositions have been funded by organizations including the Argosy Foundation, Chamber Music America with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Honolulu Mayor's Office on Culture and the Arts, Kosasa Foundation, Library of Congress, Meet the Composer, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation. Recent collaborative projects include Pāka'a Lanakila! for Chamber Music Hawaii's Spring Wind Quintet and narrator in English and Hawaiian-language versions; and TWINGE, a song cycle for Haven Trio based on Barry Bearak's New York Times article "The Day the Sea Came". Magnussen holds degrees from The Juilliard School, Conservatoire Nationale Supérieure de Musique de Paris and Cornell University. He was Artist-in-Residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton from 2000 to 2007, and is currently Assistant Professor of Music at University of Hawai'i West O'ahu.

www.jonmagnussen.com