



**KYLE
PEDERSON**

COMPOSER, PIANIST, LYRICIST, EDUCATOR
BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN SACRED AND SECULAR
MUSIC AND LYRICS PULSING WITH ENERGY, GRACE AND HOPE

CALL ACROSS

*Words by Brian Newhouse
Music by Kyle Pederson*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM
BRIAN NEWHOUSE, AUTHOR OF THE TEXT



1. This text was written in the middle of a global pandemic, when so many activities were shut down and we were locked away from each other. Loneliness -- which health experts said was a huge problem *before* the pandemic -- was out of control. Has loneliness ever showed up in your life? What does it feel like in your body? What, if anything, do you do with it, and for it? Does singing with others affect it?
2. I've always been intrigued by religions of the world -- so different than the one I grew up with in America. Several ancient African religions revere the ancestors and call on them for help in the everyday. Do you ever experience a 'nearness' of departed relatives? What is that like for you?

3. In this piece, you'll sing "Privilege protects...(beginning in M118)." What does this mean to you? What experiences in your life do you assume are normal, but which are not shared equally by others? Do you have people in your circle who envy your privilege? How about people outside your circle? Ask about their experience. Listen closely to their answer. Do you yourself envy someone else's privilege?
4. Lyrics often rhyme at the end of lines. But can you hear the rhymes within these lines? I like to use those occasionally to create a bit of internal music in the text, hoping that it inspires the composer.

**It whispers without end and bends for rain that never comes,
and at the horizon it rises like smoke.**

Can you find other examples of internal rhyme or alliterative word play in *Call Across*?

5. Lyricists use sounds of words to evoke a feeling. To paint a picture of loneliness, I tried to see the world of a mountain shepherd, and then choose images and the sounds of the words themselves to evoke their feeling. The hard consonants within and at the end of these three lines is an example.

**Not the sound of wind scraping rock,
not the leaves empty talk
nor the sound of the brook;**

Are there other words/phrases in the text that evoke a feeling for you?

6. Creation is a messy thing. The lines of *Call Across* took about three months of near-daily work to bring into this final form. Want to see a messy first draft of the first verse? I cut almost all of the following lines and kept at it. Why do think that was?

**I keep my flock safe
But I too belong to a flock,
so far away
Across the deep valley,
Through forests, river gorges**

My sheep (flock) have the comfort of each other's bodies, their woolly shoulders touch each other so gently, they speak their low muttering language all their own. When one goes missing, another raises its head and cries out in alarm, in loss.

My family, my friends are my own dear flock. How far, far away, through forest, field. So I raise my own head, and in longing and loss call them to come, to bring them near, to bring those dear faces, to bring me to them. To meet between our longing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM KYLE PEDERSON, COMPOSER



1. One of the challenges when writing this piece was **continuity**; with two languages, three continents, and multiple styles of music, I kept asking myself, "how do I keep this thing hanging together so it reads like one piece rather than individual fragments?" I made some very intentional decisions throughout with that question in mind, and one technique I used is the repetition of melodies and motives introduced earlier in the piece. Where in the piece do you find examples of this?
2. Very few choral pieces include the handpan. Why do you think I include this as part of the instrumentation? Does the handpan evoke any sort of emotion or images for you during this piece?
3. As you can read in the program notes, Brian and I collaborated with two ethnomusicologists as we crafted the piece. Why do you suppose this was important for us? After all, the music samples I found of Scandinavian music and Shona music could easily be found on the internet...
4. The musical introduction (M1-15) is longer than most intros I write. How does this intro "set up" the rest of the piece? What does this intro accomplish?

5. Text painting refers to a manner in which the text is set (by melody, harmony, rhythm, etc) that "brings to life" a word or phrase; with vivid text painting the listener can almost hear the phrase come alive. Find examples of text painting in this piece that you think are effective.
6. One of the roles of composer is to set the words of the text to highlight internal rhymes and sounds. Can you point to places where the way I've set the texts illuminates those particular sounds? (For example, check out M66-73, where I've set the text Brian mentions above in his discussion question #4.)
7. The first time you listened to the piece, did you have any particular emotional reaction when you heard *America the Beautiful* hummed (beginning in M108)? After studying the piece for a bit and rehearsing it, has that reaction changed? Remained the same?
8. Composers play with texture changes to emphasize certain elements and keep things interesting. Find examples of noticeable texture changes (solo voices vs full choir, unison vs layered parts, "busy" accompaniment vs simple/sparse accompaniment) and discuss how this affects the impact or meaning of the piece in those places. (For example, what does the unison singing at M149 accomplish? And why 4 different melodies simultaneously in M188-196?)
9. The accompaniment is an important element that can influence overall meaning and impact of a piece. Find examples of the accompaniment that you find particularly effective in conveying meaning of the text.
10. Transitions between ideas and sections is critical. Sometimes a transition includes several measures before and after the new section begins, and sometimes the transition is merely a measure or two. Because this piece is relatively long with several distinct ideas, there are several transitions throughout. Which transition do you feel is most effective? If there is a transition you find ineffective, explain why. (A couple transitions to discuss may include M139-149, or the measures leading up to M16.)
11. When I listen to music (choral and other), I often find myself thinking, "Hmm..I probably would have done that differently..." or "I wonder if doing 'x' would make the piece stronger." Find an example of this in this piece...something, if you were the composer, you would have done differently. Explain what you'd change and why.
12. If you haven't yet watched the video by Conspirare, what sorts of video images come to mind as you listen to (or sing) this piece? Once you have watched the music video, are there decisions the videographers made that you thought were particularly powerful? Were there sections that surprised you? Segments you would have approached differently if YOU were the videographer?
13. Do you have any other observations or reactions to the music or text of *Call Across*?