

War of the Scorpion

by

Brylee Daniels

A thesis accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Music

in Composition

Thesis Committee:

Robert Kyr, Chair

David Crumb, Member

Juan Eduardo Wolf, Member

University of Oregon

Spring 2024

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Brylee Daniels

Master of Music in Music Composition

Title: War of the Scorpion

The Liberian Civil Wars, spanning from 1989 to 2003, represent some of the most devastating conflicts in recent African history, dismantling the socio-political fabric of Liberia and leaving a profound impact on the nation's collective psyche. This composition, "War of the Scorpion," written to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the end of the second war, employs various experimental techniques to capture the wars' essence. The piece is structured in three movements, each symbolizing different aspects of the conflict. The first movement, "Foundations," juxtaposes elements of Liberia's cultural heritage with the uneasy peace of its founding by freed American slaves, using a bassoon soloist playing only on their bocal to evoke a sense of underlying tension. The second movement, "The First War," depicts Taylor's Christmas Eve attack on Monrovia, integrating "O Holy Night," the sound of a death whistle, and the breaking of stained glass to symbolize the St. Peter's Lutheran Church massacre. The final movement encapsulates the despair of the second war, with ensemble members repeatedly vocalizing Taylor's campaign slogan, "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will still vote for him," building from a whisper to a shout to reflect the psychological turmoil of the Liberian people. This piece aims to both memorialize the victims and educate audiences on the complex history of the Liberian Civil Wars, urging performers and listeners alike to approach the subject with respect and sensitivity, while recognizing the resilience and hope of the Liberian people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the people who have helped me gather information on the wars both from an academic perspective as well as a human perspective. I am grateful for my composition teachers' guidance: John Hennecken for introducing me to new music during my time at St. Norbert College, Robert Kyr for supporting me throughout my time at the University of Oregon, and all the other professors who have shaped me into the musician I am today. I would also like to memorialize Rev. Mark Moldrem for establishing an exchange with the Lutheran Church of Liberia which allowed me to travel to Liberia and witness the devastation firsthand. As well as Dr. Ruth Stone at Indiana University for her decades of research into the music of Liberia. Lastly, the people of Liberia for being some of the happiest and most welcoming people I have met despite everything they have been through.

DEDICATION

For the People of Liberia and all those affected by civil war.

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INSTRUMENTATION

- Solo Bassoon (Contrabassoon if available for the third movement)
- Flute
- Clarinet in B \flat
- Horn in F
- Double Bass
- Aztec Death Whistle or loud vocal screams (the whistle is preferred as it produces a more consistent sound without the performer losing or hurting their voice)
- Minimum of three panes of stained-glass; use of protective gloves and crash box highly recommended

Preface:

The Liberian Civil Wars, spanning from 1989 to 2003, are among the most devastating conflicts in recent African history. These wars not only dismantled the socio-political fabric of Liberia but also left an indelible mark on the nation's collective psyche. The wars' origins, progression, and aftermath are complex and multifaceted, involving political corruption, ethnic tensions, and international influences.

Liberia's descent into chaos began on December 24, 1989, when Charles Taylor, a former government official, led the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in a rebellion against President Samuel Doe. Doe's regime, marked by corruption and human rights abuses, had alienated many Liberians. Taylor's insurgency, however, quickly escalated into a full-blown civil war, drawing in various factions with competing interests. The war's first phase, lasting until 1996, was characterized by brutal violence, including widespread atrocities against civilians. Massacres, such as the infamous St. Peter's Lutheran Church massacre, where hundreds of civilians seeking refuge were killed, highlighted the war's horrific nature.

Before becoming the notorious warlord and later president, Taylor was a government official under President Samuel Doe. However, accusations of embezzlement led to his arrest in the United States in 1983. Taylor managed to escape from the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Massachusetts in 1985, under mysterious circumstances that have never been fully explained. His escape allowed him to flee to Libya, where he received military training and support from Muammar Gaddafi. This period was crucial in Taylor's transformation into a formidable insurgent leader, enabling him to return to Liberia and launch the NPFL rebellion in 1989.

Ethnic divisions further fueled the conflict. Liberia's population is comprised of multiple ethnic groups, and historical grievances often led to targeted violence. This ethnic violence compounded the humanitarian crisis, displacing hundreds of thousands and creating a refugee crisis that spilled over into neighboring countries.

The international community's response to the Liberian Civil Wars was initially tepid. Regional organizations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), played a crucial role in attempting to mediate and intervene. ECOWAS established the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a peacekeeping force that struggled to maintain order amid the chaos. Despite their efforts, peace remained elusive, and the fighting continued, characterized by shifting alliances and a constant state of instability.

A fragile peace was brokered in 1996, leading to democratic elections in 1997. Charles Taylor, leveraging his notoriety and influence, won the presidency with a campaign slogan that starkly captured the paradox of Liberian loyalty: "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will still vote for him." This victory, however, did not bring lasting peace. Taylor's presidency was marred by continued violence, corruption, and the exploitation of Liberia's natural resources, particularly diamonds, to fuel conflicts both within and outside Liberia's borders.

The second Liberian Civil War erupted in 1999, as various rebel groups, disillusioned with Taylor's rule, sought to overthrow him. This phase of the conflict was equally brutal with human rights violations perpetrated by all sides. The war finally drew to a close in 2003, when international pressure, coupled with relentless rebel advances, forced Taylor to resign and seek exile in Nigeria.

The aftermath of the wars left Liberia in ruins. The death toll is estimated to be around 250,000, with millions more suffering from the physical and psychological scars of the conflict.

Infrastructure was decimated, and the economy was in tatters. However, the post-war period also marked the beginning of Liberia's recovery. The establishment of a transitional government and the subsequent election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female president, in 2005, were pivotal steps towards rebuilding the nation.

"War of the Scorpion" was written for the people of Liberia on the 20th anniversary of the end of the second war. Taylor was known to use a scorpion as a symbol of his party and campaign. In this piece, various experimental techniques are used to represent various aspects of the wars. This includes the bassoon soloist playing only on their bocal, the sound of a death whistle, aleatoric sections of chaos, breaking panes of stained glass, and repeated spoken phrases that turn into shouting.

The first movement uses several tunes to guide the listener through the founding of Liberia. "All Hail Liberia, Hail" is the national anthem of Liberia and sets the piece up showing the listener the focus of the piece. The next tune, "My Country 'Tis of Thee," shows the American influence in Liberia's colonization. This is then followed by a place and time setter of "I Wish I was in Dixie" revealing the foundations of freed slaves moving to Africa after working on plantations in 19th century America. The final tune is a plantation song called "Ma Curly Headed Baby" and is a plantation song that was sung in the plantations in America that then crossed the ocean and sung by rubber plantation workers in Liberia.

Playing on the bocal imposes a sense of unease underneath a peaceful situation, much as the founding of Liberia by freed slaves in the United States. Playing dynamics on just the bocal can be difficult, thus the phrase "as much as possible" is provided as the soloist should try their best to play the written dynamics.

In the second movement, “The First War,” the Christmas tune “O Holy Night” sets the scene for Taylor’s first attack on Monrovia, entitled “Operation Octopus,” which was carried out on the evening of Christmas Eve. This is quickly interrupted by the sound of a death whistle as the ensemble deteriorates into chaos. At multiple times, the soloist is instructed to break panes of stained glass. This is in remembrance of the victims of the St. Peter’s Lutheran Church Massacre, which to this day still has the bullet holes in its walls and stained-glass windows.

The third movement attempts to capture the atmosphere of the second war. During this movement, ensemble members are tasked with repeatedly saying the phrase “He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will still vote for him.” This is to start quietly and slowly build into shouting over the course of several minutes. Ensemble members should try to be as dissonant and out of time as possible. The goal of this is to create the feeling of despair felt by the people of Liberia leading up to the election of Taylor.

During my time in Liberia on a mission trip through my Wisconsin-based church in 2013, I had the opportunity to engage deeply with the local communities. We spent a portion of our time at the Lutheran Compound in Monrovia, where we assisted the women in sewing traditional Liberian clothing. This experience not only allowed us to contribute to their local economy but also provided a platform for cultural exchange and understanding. Our mission extended to the Lutheran Compound in Totota and a school in Zienzu, where we primarily worked with people of the Kpelle tribe in Bong County. We brought texts written in Kpelle to help the educators teach their students how to read, which was incredibly rewarding. The warm welcome we received at the airport, meeting some of the friendliest people, and experiencing the spiciest food I’ve ever tasted has left a lasting impression on me.

These experiences have profoundly shaped my understanding of Liberia and its people, particularly in the context of the devastating civil wars. The conflicts not only tore apart the socio-political fabric of Liberia but also left a deep scar on the nation's collective memory. The origins, progression, and aftermath of the wars are complex, involving political corruption, ethnic tensions, and international influences. The brutality of these wars underscores the need for ongoing support and solidarity with the Liberian people as they continue to rebuild and heal.

This piece is meant to memorialize as well as educate readers on the Liberian Civil Wars. Performers are encouraged to do more research on the wars as they were vastly more complex than could be represented in this piece. It is important to approach this subject with utmost respect and sensitivity. While the people of Liberia have been completely devastated, they remain hopeful for a brighter future.

War of the Scorpion

Score (in C)

For the People of Liberia

Brylee Daniels (2024)
ASCAP

I: Foundations

All Hail Liberia, Hail!
proclamatory

$\text{♩} = 120$

The musical score is written for five instruments: Flute, Clarinet in Bb, Solo Bassoon, Horn in F, and Double Bass. The key signature is C major and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 120$. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The Flute part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill-like figure. The Clarinet in Bb and Horn in F parts play a similar rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Solo Bassoon part is mostly silent, indicated by a series of vertical bar lines. The Double Bass part provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score concludes with a final cadence in the Flute and Horn in F parts.

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Fl. *mf*

B♭ Cl. *mp*

Bsn. *p* on vocal (do not match pitch with others)

Hn. *mp*

D.B. *mp mf*

on vocal *f* (as much as possible)

on vocal *f* (as much as possible)

[A]

Fl. *p*

B♭ Cl. *pp*

Bsn. *f*

Hn. *pp*

D.B. *p*

play random notes, start with pitches close together and then expand pitches higher and lower

play random notes, start with pitches close together and then expand pitches higher and lower

play random notes, start with pitches close together and then expand pitches higher and lower

sfz

sfz

sfz

35

Fl. *ff*

B_♭ Cl. *pp* play random notes, start with pitches close together and then expand pitches higher and lower

Bsn. *pp* play with drawn vibrato

Hm. *sfz*

D.B. *n sfz* *n*

49

Fl. *p* *f*

B_♭ Cl. *p* *f*

Bsn. *p* *f* *n* *sfz*

Hm. *n* *sfz*

D.B. *n* *sfz*

B
 My Country, 'tis of Thee
 Patriotically
 Andante (♩ = 80)

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

D.B.

mf

p

mf

Fl. ⁷⁴

C
 I Wish I Was in Dixie

D
 Ma Curly Headed Baby
 With a sense of loss
 Largo ♩ = 40

ad lib cadenza, progressively make melody less prevalent each repeat

B♭ Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

D.B.

mf

f

f

p

Fl. *mf* *1/13*

B \flat Cl. *mf*

Bsn. *1/13* *ad*

Hn. *mf* *1/13*

D.B. *mf* *ad*

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), B♭ Clarinet (B \flat Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The score is written in a system with five staves. The Flute and B♭ Clarinet parts are in treble clef, while the Bassoon, Horn, and Double Bass parts are in bass clef. The Flute and B♭ Clarinet parts start with a *mf* dynamic and a *1/13* marking. The Bassoon part has a *1/13* marking and a *ad* marking. The Horn part has a *mf* dynamic and a *1/13* marking. The Double Bass part has a *mf* dynamic and a *ad* marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

2: The First War

O Holy Night
In a holy manner

$\text{♩} = 60$

A

Flute

Clarinet in B \flat

Bassoon

Horn in F

Double Bass

B
Sudden fear
Allegro ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 120+$)
Vamp

Fl.

B \flat Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

D.B.

Squeal/Squeek

ff
Death Whistle/Vocal Screams
Play until m.21
Breath Irregularly

ff but not over-powering

Bow on wrapping of E string

ff

18

Vamp

Create Chaotic and Unpredictable Dissonant Sounds. Repeat until it is too much for the Bassoon Player

Fl.

B \flat Cl.

ff

Create Chaotic and Unpredictable Dissonant Sounds. Repeat until it is too much for the Bassoon Player

Bsn.

ff

Flutter/click keys as loud as possible, fight to be heard

Hn.

Create Chaotic and Unpredictable Dissonant Sounds. Repeat until it is too much for the Bassoon Player

D.B.

3

3

3

3

24

Vamp

sim.

Fl.

B \flat Cl.

sim.

Break a piece of stained glass

Bsn.

sim.

Hn.

sim.

D.B.

3

3

3

3

Fl. ³⁰ *Vamp*

B \flat Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

D.B. ³⁰

3

3

3

3

ff

3: The Second War

Out of time
Afraid for your life

Bassoon



Ensemble:

Flute



One or more members repeatedly say the phrase "*He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will still vote for him,*"

Clarinet in B_♭



start slow and quiet, build over the course of several minutes to shouting with overwhelming emotion,

Horn in F



do not match others, be unpredictable, be aggressive,

Double Bass



you are the voices of the unknowably large number of casualties...

A
 Contrabassoon (if possible/available)

Bsn. *Vamp*

p *f* *p*

ad lib, start reserved then progressively fight to be heard over shouting. Repeat material as if you are saying the same thing over and over with no response

Fl. *Vamp*

p *f* *p*

ad lib, start reserved then progressively fight to be heard over shouting. Repeat material as if you are saying the same thing over and over with no response

Continue saying phrase while building

B \flat Cl. *Vamp*

p *f* *p*

ad lib, start reserved then progressively fight to be heard over shouting. Repeat material as if you are saying the same thing over and over with no response

Hn. *Vamp*

p *f* *p*

ad lib, start reserved then progressively fight to be heard over shouting. Repeat material as if you are saying the same thing over and over with no response

D.B. *Vamp*

p *f* *p*

ad lib, start reserved then progressively fight to be heard over shouting. Repeat material as if you are saying the same thing over and over with no response

B
 With Anger!
 = 144

Bsn. *Vamp*

sfz

Fl. *Vamp*

sfz

B \flat Cl. *Vamp*

sfz

Hn. *Vamp*

sfz

D.B. *Vamp*

sfz

Bsn. *Vamp* *f* *Vamp*
 Fl. *f*
 B \flat Cl.
 Hn.
 D.B.



Bsn. *V*
 Fl. *V*
 B \flat Cl. *V*
 Hn. *V*
 D.B. *V*

C *Vamp*

Bsn. *p* *ff*

Fl. *mp*

B \flat Cl. *mp*

Hn. *mp*

D.B. *mp*

All say the phrase together as one voice

29 *f* *ff* *Boldly* *mp*

Bsn. *f* *mp*

Fl. *mf* *fp* *mf*

B \flat Cl. *mf* *fp* *mf*

Hn. *mf* *fp* *mf*

D.B. *mf* *fp* *mf*

mp