

This work was commissioned by the 1989

Greenwich Festival and first performed

by Amanda Roccroft, Omar Ebrahim and

the composer as pianist in the Blackheath

Concert Halls on June 16th. 1989.

Duration : c. 17 mins.

FIVE RONDOS
(Words by Ursula Vaughan Williams)

1 Pastoral

She: Who hunts the creatures of the wood
claiming their haunts to be his land?

He: One who will take your holding too
if you refuse his least command.

She: What can a tyrant ask of me?

He: The beauty that you cannot hide;

white dove, white doe, your liberty,
all that is mine in love and pride.

She: If I am captive, lost and gone
what can he claim from you, dear heart?

He: My duty, service, life and death,
the years that we must spend apart.

She: Where there's no bread wisdom and love go begging.

He: Weep and endure.

She: Children too cold to cry stare at the open sky,
scarecrow rags of age clothe long despair.

He: The running stag, the flying doe,
the hare, the fox are hidden fast.

She: The lovers part; their voices fade
into dark shadows of the past.

2 The Prisoner

The prisoner's hand knew every stone,
The broken curve of fossil shell,
low arch and crooked flags that tell
shape and dimension of his cell
where he was captive and alone.

And soon his sight had learned to stay
brooding on lintel, bar or boss
on each green hair of dripping moss,
each shadow change that crept across
the grille of light that was his day.

The prisoner's ear learned subtle sound,
the crack of ice, far fall of rain,
grief and fear that weep in vain,
strange voices crying through his brain
like creeping rumours of the ground.

His mouth found bread's dark taste of rye,
his lips the thirst foul waters hold.
His body ached with ceaseless cold,
corruption of dank stone and mould,
tossed in the fevers of his sty.

No freedom sets the prisoner free;
although the chains fall at his feet
and doors give back the day, the street
where voices speak and strangers meet.
Are they the shadows or is he?

He left no sign, but chains must bind
a weight of sorrow in his place.
His footsteps echo, pace by pace.
And where is he that left no trace?
Captive in dungeons of his mind.

3 Marie Antoinette on the way to the scaffold
(after David)

I have no kingdom now. Looser, loose all.
My hands are tied.
I wait the little moment of the blade.
I alone
will not hear it fall
to give inheritance of heaven to me.
Though I am made of fear and cold as stone
none mocking in the streets shall see
I am afraid.
They scream for freedom. I am the one they free.

4 The Headsman

I am the master of all time's revenges
for those oppressed through centuries of toil,
all bound to plough and sow for other's food,
bent backs, crook'd fingers, prey to hunger's cold,
for children, early servants to the soil,
taxes and lusts against the common good,
and for the prisons where young lives grow old.

I am the master of all time's revenges.
Headsman, I teach a true equality
to staring eyes, to the last, startled breath,
alike to prince, to duchess, girl or boy
whose blood is charter for their right to die.
I am the people's hands, enforcing death.
Those who destroyed our hopes we must destroy.

I am the master of my times revenge.
If there are innocents among this throng
my harvest of the dead, reaped by nightfall
pity may clothe their memory in tears.
So many die by right, so few by wrong;
impartial earth in time will cover all
while a new freedom shines on future years,
death's elegy a half-heard undersong,
to liberty, to brotherhood and equal chance.

5 Lament
for Libert , Egalit  and Fraternit 

Freedom and justice are the hope of all
both won by sacrifice of many lives.
Look in Time's mirror, ask history who survives,
question each empire of its rise and fall,
what fears, what debts bind anguish to the free?
Lost brotherhood is price of liberty.

to Nicholas Williams
in friendship

FIVE RONDOS

for soprano, baritone and

piano

Roger Steptoe 1989

words by Ursula Vaughan Williams

I : Pastoral

Allarghetto (senza misura) (♩ = 96)

mp lirico

Sop.

bar.

pno

Who hunts the creatures of the wood — who haunts —

the crea-tures of the wood

Sop. *mf* *f*
 clai—ming their haunts ——— to be his land?

p'no *ppchiss. rit.* *a tempo*
f *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*

Sop. *mp*
 land, (and) (and) (and)

p'no *mf* *sonore*

Sop. *mp*
 (and)

bar. *mp* *mp* *mp*
ppchiss. rit. . a tempo One who will take your hol—ding

p'no *f* *dim.* *mp*