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OBLIVION

A CHAMBER OPERA IN ONE ACT

FULL SCORE

MUSIC AND LIBRETTO BY
FREE SAMPLE SCORE
KYLE GULLINGS

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY
“EX OBLIVIONE” (1921) BY H. P. LOVECRAFT

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Characters / Setting / Synopsis

CHARACTERS

	Howard Bright	Lyric Baritone	Business consultant, early-60's
	Sonia Bright	Lyric Soprano	His wife, florist, late-50's
	Philip Bright / Sage 3	Lyric Tenor	Their son, early-30's
Dream Chorus	Dr. Greene / Sage 2	Mezzo-Soprano	A doctor, late-40's
	Nurse / Sage 1 / Tara Bright	Light Lyric Soprano	A nurse, mid-20's / Philip's wife (Tara)

SETTING

Time: About the year 2010 Place: A suburb in the Upper Midwest

SYNOPSIS

A series of four scenes, each set three months apart, each consisting of one dream and one scene in the waking world. From beyond, Howard gives an account of his journey: Howard is a business consultant who has a vivid dream in which he sails southward under unfamiliar constellations. That morning, he and his wife Sonia go about their lives, somewhat irritable and half-listening to each other. Their son Philip and his wife, Tara, have recently conceived a child. After Howard rushes out the door, Sonia, a florist by hobby and profession, admires the abundance of life in her garden in summer.

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Howard has a second dream, this time traversing an underground cavern that leads to a subterranean world in which everything is suspended in the soft electric glow of twilight. When he wakes, Howard is in a hospital room. He receives an unexpected diagnosis of a terminal illness. He does not tell Sonia at first.

Howard has now developed a recurring dream in which he enters a golden valley which leads to a shadowy grove. In the depths of the grove, he encounters a massive stone wall with a tiny, locked bronze gate he cannot pass through. He begins to take more interest in his dream world than in his waking life, which Sonia and Philip find somewhat worrisome. Philip comes to visit, and they talk briefly of Howard's progressing illness and his growing obsession with his dreams.

Howard dreams again, this time reading in ancient scriptures conflicting descriptions of the world beyond the bronze gate. The first sage describes the a world of bliss, the second a hell, and the third a neutral, distant existence. Howard is inspired by these accounts, learns how to pass through the gate, and vows to enter it. When he awakes, in his final moments of life, he has a surge of energy that surprises Sonia, who has been keeping a vigil in his room. Philip arrives with news that he and Tara recently had a baby girl. They have a brief conversation and agree to speak more in the morning. Philip leaves for home while Sonia and Howard settle in to sleep for the night.

In a final tableaux, waking-world scenes begin to meld with Howard's final dream. He is in the process of dying. As he drifts one last time through the golden valley, Philip reads a brief remembrance at his funeral service. Howard continues to approach the bronze gate, and Sonia appears lamenting his death while alone in her garden. Finally, Howard comes to the bronze gate and finds it unlocked. He passes through and finds on the other side he finds only "the white void of unpeopled and illimitable space." He dissolves happily into oblivion, leaving those around him alone and uncertain.

Notes on the Score

SINGING BOWLS

The score calls for three singing bowls, also known as Tibetan singing bowls. While not tuned to the standard Western system, their pitches approximate the notes used in the score:

- Bowl 1 - F4
- Bowl 2 - Db5
- Bowl 3 - Gb3

Bowls may vary in pitch from those above by up to one whole step. They should sound harmonious when struck together. In the premiere, the bowls were played by the instrumentalists.

Bowls may be played by either a wooden or a leather-wrapped beater. They are generally "sung" by rubbing the beater around their rims. A diamond-shaped notehead indicates a percussive gong-like strike.

BREATH MARKS

In addition to the standard breath marks, the score uses another symbol resembling a string player's "upbow" mark. This second symbol indicates a very brief breath or lift.

SOUND CUES

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A small number of sound cues are indicated in the score, including the sounds of waves and a sink dripping. Use of these cues is optional but recommended.

AUDIO BALANCE

Depending on the performance space, the ensemble - particularly the guitar and the singing bowls - may need to be amplified with a microphone.

Kyle Gullings
June, 2010

Source Information

The following texts are set or referenced in the libretto, in whole or in part.

AUTHOR	TITLE
Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah	<i>Qur'an</i> 18:31, 35:34-35, 38:49-54 [excerpts] (610-632?) M. H. Shakir, translator
Dante Alighieri	<i>L'Inferno</i> , Canto VII, from <i>La Divina Commedia</i> (1308-1321?) Rev. H. F. Cary, M.A., translator
Anonymous	<i>The Bible</i> , King James Version. Job 7:9, Proverbs 30:16
Anonymous	<i>Deuterocanonical Books of the Bible</i> , Sirach 17:27-28
Samuel Butler	“I Fall Asleep in the Full and Certain Hope” from <i>Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later, Both by the Original Discoverer of the Country and by His Son</i> (1901)
Omar Khayyám	“Dreaming when Dawn’s Left Hand Was in the Sky” [excerpt] “There Was a Door to Which I Found No Key” [excerpt] from the collection <i>Rubáiyát</i> (1048-1131?) Edward Fitzgerald, translator
Howard Phillips Lovecraft	“Ex Oblivione” (1921) ¹
Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche	“Night in Kalapa” (2003) ²
Wallace Stevens	“Home Again” (1914)
William Carlos Williams	“El Hombre” “A Portrait in Greys” both from <i>Al Que Quiere!</i> (1917)
	“The Widow's Lament in Springtime” from <i>Sour Grapes</i> (1921)
William Butler Yeats	“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” [excerpt] (1890)

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Notes on the Libretto

- 1.) The short story “Ex Oblivione” by H. P. Lovecraft first appeared in *The United Amateur*, 20, No. 4 (March 1921), 59-60, under the pseudonym Ward Phillips. A full-text e-copy of the publication can be found at the following URL:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/30637>
- 2.) “Night in Kalapa” by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, from *Snow Lion's Delight: 108 Poems* (Halifax, N.S.: The Kalapa Court, 2005). Used by permission.

All other appropriated sources, including the short story “Ex Oblivione,” are in the Public Domain.

For more information on H. P. Lovecraft's life and works, visit:
<http://www.hplovecraft.com>

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Scene Breakdown

<u>SCENE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Prologue	A message outside of both time and space		1
Scene 1a	First Dream: Sailing Under Strange Stars	July	3
Scene 1b-1	Recitative	July, 7:15 A.M.	9
Scene 1b-2	Aria: The Plumtree (Sonia)		22
Scene 2a	Second Dream: Underground River Barge	October	34
Scene 2b	Recitative	October, 12:30 P.M.	41
Scene 3a	Third Dream: Recurring Valley	January	59
Scene 3b-1	Recitative 1	January, 5:45 P.M.	68
Scene 3b-2	Aria: Dreaming Is Not Living (Philip)		75
Scene 3b-3	Recitative 2		79
Scene 4a-1	Fourth Dream 1	April	83
Scene 4a-2	Aria: The Garden of Perpetuity (Sage 1)		85
Scene 4a-3	Fourth Dream 2		91
Scene 4a-4	Aria: You Begin a Descent (Sage 2)		92
Scene 4a-5	Fourth Dream 3		100
Scene 4a-6	Aria: Our Grey Indifference (Sage 3)		101
Scene 4a-7	Fourth Dream 4		109
Scene 4b-1	Recitative 1	April, 11:00 P.M.	113
Scene 4b-2	Aria: Night in Kalapa (Howard)		114
Scene 4b-3	Recitative 2		132
Scene 4c-1	Final Dream 1	later in April	139
Scene 4c-2	Aria: I Fall Asleep in the Full and Certain Hope (Philip)		143
Scene 4c-3	Final Dream 2		147
Scene 4c-4	Aria: Sorrow Is My Own Yard (Sonia)		148
Scene 4c-5	Final Dream 3		159

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