

Scott Ordway

Detroit

A short urban allegory
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Text by the composer drawn from original sources

A concert version of this work was commissioned by the Michigan Recital Project and first presented on October 3rd, 2013 at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Detroit, MI by Margot Rood (soprano), Emily Marvosh (mezzo), and Joseph Turbessi (piano).

The staged version was first presented on July 3rd, 2014 at Club Gretchen in Berlin. The soprano role was sung by Danielle Zuber; the alto role was sung by Alexandra Schulz; the piano part was played by Ralph Zedler. The production was presented by the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler and directed by Alexander Scholz.

A version for voices and string quartet was commissioned by the Michigan Recital Project for the Arneis String Quartet and first presented in Boston, MA on January 20, 2015.

Piano-Vocal Score. Also available for string quartet and voices.

Cast

First Allegory of Detroitsoprano

Second Allegory of Detroit..... mezzo-soprano

Synopsis

Two Allegories of Detroit symbolize earlier phases in the city's evolution: the dawn of the automotive industry in the early 20th century ("The wheels looked like bicycle wheels today") and the rise of the Motown music scene in the postwar era ("I wish it would rain..."). Their interaction creates the conditions for a third, still unknown phase of the city's evolution ("How still the garden seems.")

Location

A stylized abstraction of a mid-20th century city.

Texts & Sources

The wheels looked like bicycle wheels today.

—Paul B. Shirley, b. July 30, 1912

This fragment refers to the Ford Model T automobile, which was manufactured in Highland Park, Michigan from 1908 to 1927. Remnants of the old Model T assembly line, now covered in vines and surrounded by abandoned buildings, can still be seen today. Before World War II, Ford was alone among the Big Three automakers in employing black workers.

Excerpted from Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918–1967. Elaine Latzman Moon, ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994.

Paul B. Shirley was born on July 30, 1912 in Dayton, Ohio. He moved to Detroit in November, 1919. He worked as a waiter at the Barlum Hotel from 1928–33, and he has also worked at the Downtown Club and Penobscot Club. During the Roosevelt administration, under the National Recovery Program, he dug ditches, cleaned alleys, set out tress, and blacktopped roads. He has entertained as a singer, dancer, and stand-up comedian in clubs such as Lark's Grill, Turf Bar, and Flame Show Bar. Mr. Shirley is currently a participant in the Detroit Urban League's Seniors in Community Service Program.

I wish it would rain (oh how I wish that it would rain). 'Cause so badly, I wanna go outside.

—The Temptations, 1967

This fragment is an excerpt from the song “I Wish It Would Rain”, by Norman Whitfield, Barrett Strong, and Roger Penzabene. In 1967, it was recorded by the Temptations at Motown Records' famed Studio A on West Grand Boulevard. Soon after its release, the song would reach No. 1 on Billboard's R&B charts.

Earlier that year, and not far from Studio A, a police raid on an unlicensed bar precipitated a five-day riot, one of the most violent and destructive in United States history. Residents describe the days following July 23, 1967 as days which changed the city forever. The riots were the result of decades of social inequality, unequal employment, overtly racist real estate practices, and other de facto segregation; they initiated a permanent a cycle of mutual fear and distrust which remains palpable in the city today.

How still the garden seems...

—Original text by the composer, 2013

In some neighborhoods of Detroit, people have begun to plant gardens in vacant lots; in some areas, organizations have repurposed entire city blocks as sustainable farms. This original line of text was inspired by a visit to several of these urban oases in May 2013, and by the quiet resilience of the Detroiters who tend to them.

Composer's Note

In May 2013, I visited Michigan and had conversations with regular Detroiters about the life of their city. These conversations revealed three distinct moments of creative growth, decline, and rebirth that shape the way residents understand their city. The first was the golden age of the automobile industry in the 1920s; the second was the flourishing of Motown music in the 1950s and 60s. And last, current residents are mindful of the fact that they live during a period of great uncertainty, but also a period transformation, renewal, and hope.

To create this intergenerational work, I chose minimal fragments of text that represent these three moments. A former assembly line worker describes the wheels on a Ford Model A; The Temptations record "I Wish It Would Rain" on the eve of the 1967 race riots; and Detroiters today reclaim unused city blocks to plant urban gardens and farms. In the work, each line is sung in multiple ways and combined in counterpoint; the music therefore echoes the city's capacity for unexpected renewal and rebirth.

SJO

Commissioned by the Michigan Recital Project with special thanks to Marie H el ene Bernard.

Detroit

Urban allegory for soprano, mezzo-soprano, & piano (2014)

Moderato – meccanico (♩ = 72)

scott ordway (b. 1984)

The musical score is written for Mezzo, Soprano, and Piano. It is in 3/4 time and consists of three systems of music. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is Moderato – meccanico with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The Mezzo part begins with the lyrics "The wheels" and is marked *sotto voce*. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with triplets and is marked *pppp*. The Soprano part enters at measure 5 with the lyrics "The wheels looked" and is also marked *sotto voce*. The Mezzo part continues with "The wheels The wheels The wheels looked". The Piano part includes a section marked *pp* and features a five-measure rest in the bass line. The score is marked with various dynamics and performance instructions such as *sempre una corda* and *con pedale*.

13

Sopr. like like looked like looked like

Mezzo The The The wheels looked like

(Sop)-----

16

Sopr.

Mezzo

cresc.

p

(Sop)-----

20

Sopr. The wheels looked

poco rit.

a tempo

p

dim.

ppp

tre corde

(Sop)-----

24 *sim.* *mp*

Sopr. like bi - cy - cle wheels to - day. The wheels

Mezzo *mp* The wheels

28 *cresc.* *mf*

Sopr. looked like bi - cy - cle wheels to - day. The

Mezzo *cresc.* *mf* looked like bi - cy - cle wheels to - day. The

32 *dim.* *p*

Sopr. wheels looked like bi - cy - cle wheels to - day.

Mezzo *dim.* *p* wheels looked like bi - cy - cle wheels to - day.

molto stringendo ----- *rit.*-----

36 *pp*

Sopr.
to - day.

Mezzo
pp
to - day.

mf

41 *a tempo* *poco rit.* *a tempo*
mp espr.

Mezzo
I wish

p

45

Mezzo
I wish I wish that it would

S_{va}

49 *cresc.* *poco rit.* *a tempo*
sub. p

Mezzo
rain. 'Cause so bad - ly 'Cause so

cresc. *sub. p*

54 Mezzo *allarg.*

bad - ly I wan-na go go out - side. out - side.

p cresc. *poco pesante*

60 *Più vivo - flessibile* (♩ = 82)

f *pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

(quasi niente) very fast tremolo con pedale


67 *f* *p*


72 Mezzo *rit.* ----- *a tempo* *teneramente*

The wheels


pppp *ppp*

77

Sopr. 

Mezzo 

cresc.



82

Sopr. 

Mezzo 



86

allarg. ----- *Languido, espressivo* (♩ = 60)

Sopr. 

Mezzo 

f *mp* *dim.* *p*

Sub



Piu allegro - leggerissimo (♩ = 120)

92

Sopr. day. _____ to - day. _____ The wheels looked like looked

Mezzo _____ *p* The wheels looked like - bi - cy - cle

pp

97

Sopr. like _____ looked like _____ looked like _____

Mezzo wheels to - day. _____ wheels _____ wheels to - day. _____

100

Sopr. *cresc.* looked like _____ to - day. _____ *sub. p* The

Mezzo *cresc.* wheels _____ to - day. _____ *sub. p* The wheels looked _____

cresc. *f* *sub. pp*

Sva

103

Sopr. wheels The wheels looked like wheels to — day. —

Mezzo like bi - cy - cle wheels to — day. to - day wheels to - day. —

ppp

107

Sopr. to day — the — wheels to - day — the — wheels — The —

Mezzo to - day. — the wheels to - day to - day the — wheels —

mf secco p

senza pedale

111

Sopr. wheels — looked — like — The — wheels — looked — looked —

Mezzo The — wheels looked — like — bi - cy - cle looked —

114 *cresc.*

Sopr. like — bi - cy - cle wheels looked like looked like bi - cy - cle wheels

Mezzo like — bi - cy - cle wheels looked like looked like bi - cy - cle wheels

118 *p*

Sopr. to - day. — like —

Mezzo to - day. — like — bi - cy - cle wheels

mf *p*

121

Sopr. bi - cy - cle wheels *sotto voce, come sopra*

Mezzo like — bi - cy - cle wheels — the

molto legato

sempre con pedale (very blurry) *pp*

124

Mezzo

wheels The wheels

129

Sopr.

Mezzo

Oh Oh, how I wish

Oh Oh, how I Oh,

(8va)

p sempre

134

Sopr.

Mezzo

how how

Oh, Oh, how I

(8va)

non ritardando

138

Sopr. *I* wish *I* wish that

Mezzo wish *I* *I* 'Cause *I* wan - na

Piu largo (♩ = ♩.)

142

Sopr. it *I*

Mezzo go out - - - side 'Cause *I* wan - na

cresc. poco a poco

145

Sopr. wish that it would *f* that it would rain

Mezzo go out - side. *I* wish *I* wish that *f* it would

149 *rit.* ----- *a tempo*

Sopr. it would rain.

Mezzo it would rain. How still

mp

ff *mp*

sempre cresc. e dim. pochiss.

153

Sopr. How still the gar -

Mezzo How still How still How

156 *p* *stringendo*

Sopr. den How still How

Mezzo still the How still

p *mp* *pp cresc. molto espr.*

160

Sopr. still How How still

Mezzo How still How still

poco rit. ----- *a tempo*

164 *p* *f*

Sopr. the How still the gar den seems

Mezzo the How still the gar den seems

ff *p* *f*

Piu lento *f* *Ancora piu lento* *p cresc.*

167

Sopr. How still the gar den seems How still the

Mezzo How still the gar den seems How still the

p *f* *p cresc.*

Ancora più lento

170

Sopr. *pp*
gar - den seems. How still the gar - den seems.

Mezzo *pp*
gar - den seems. How still the gar - den seems.

f *pp*

174 Moderato tranquillo - calmando (♩ = 60) *sotto voce, as at the beginning*

Sopr. How still the

Mezzo

p dolce, molto legato

con pedale *sim.*

177

Sopr. gar den seems. *semplice, dolciss.* How still the

Mezzo How still the gar - den seems.

181

Sopr. gar - den seems.

Mezzo How still

185

Mezzo How still How still

189 *allargando al fine*

Mezzo

192

let ring

ppp pppp

ped.