

# SANCTUARIES

libretto

Anis Mojgani, librettist

Darrell Grant, composer

**THIRD  
ANGLE**  
NEW MUSIC

## THE FOUR TRAVELERS

**The Returner**, a woman in her 50s.

**The Reverend**, a man in his 70s.

**The Artist**, a man in his 30s.

**Carpenter**, a wanderer of indeterminate age or gender.

## THE APPARITION

**White**

All are black.

## Prelude

## 1. Processional

## 2. Invocation/When Falls A Thing

RETURNER:

Spirits!

A field here,

where once a house was.

and with a tree

of cherries and light

and a mother

--mine--

in a dress

colored a June raspberry red.

Spirit!

A field here,

where once a house was

and my father

with a laugh like bowls flying through the air.

--when they took the house

and before they took to knocking it down

I buried

a hair pulled from my head

at the roots of our cherry tree.

thought

it would lead me

Back

(Spoken) to the house.

Spirits!

--When a thing falls and sings,

what sound the song

if the thing has no mouth?

When falls a thing

what song the sound  
of the thing that sings  
if the thing has no mouth  
And does the song still come  
from somewhere,  
if it cannot come out  
Where once a house was,  
was many houses,  
with many trees  
now gone.

When falls a thing,  
what song the sound  
of the thing that sings,  
if the thing has no mouth?  
And if the thing the body hold  
in the body--

where does it go when the body goes?

(Spoken) --when they knock down the house  
where did go the home?

REVEREND: (Spoken) Everything begins somewhere--

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### 3. Spirits of the Field

RETURNER:

Light a flame and call to the spirits -

Lay down earth of the homeland.

Call out to what once was--

Call out to what is.

Call out to what would be.

Clothe thy selves in new cloth.

May we make ourselves known to the Wound.

May the Wound make it known to us.

May we make ourselves known to ourselves.

May we undress the Wound and clothe it again.

May the river be wet on our skin.

ENSEMBLE:

May we marvel, marvel at the river--at where we just

stepped from.

at what moves us, what moves beautifully before us  
and behind us, and snaking beautifully to some place past  
what we can see.

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#### 4. Who does the City Serve?

REVEREND:

Everywhere and always

it always been the same story

--the men came and said

you got to go to another part of the yard now

ENSEMBLE: Where?

REVEREND:

I don't care they say, but not here--somewhere else

And so I go to another part of the field

and the seasons turn

and the trees bend

and then again the man comes and say to me again

I got to go

WE got to go

And so again I ask GO...

ENSEMBLE: Where?

REVEREND:

To where might we be given

peace of mind and a piece of earth

in which to finally grow

to throw down roots

for we are a rootless people--and I know

this ain't nothing new to you

and nothing new to they that made us so

--Whether it was

your daddy's home or your mother's

your mother's or your grandmother's

your grandma's or your auntie's

your auntie's or your great auntie's

it's the same story--

The man comes and says  
 “the place where you live  
 though once not good enough for us to live in  
 now is and SO  
 we need it back”

And always under the name of progress

The banner of urban renewal

ENSEMBLE: Development! City growth!

REVEREND:

Whose growth?

Whose development?

Whose renewal?

For the sake of whom is being renewed?

ENSEMBLE: Not ours. No Lord!

REVEREND:

Not with our families pushed out.

How many houses they bury on Minnesota

so *other* folks could drive north?

When their renewal decimated our neighborhood where  
 were they?

What was being renewed when the gangs came  
 the drugs followed

and the young men on the corner lost and bundled together  
 with nowhere to turn but to breaking into houses and  
 muggings on the street?

With the shops closing  
 and our windows boarded,  
 where was they then?

ENSEMBLE: Not here!

REVEREND:

Not here where the lenders take advantage  
 and drive more of us out.  
 and now where are we?

What do we have?

What does the city hold for us?

For whom is the city making itself?

For you?

ENSEMBLE: Naw!

REVEREND: For Me?

ENSEMBLE: Naw!

REVEREND: For ghosts!

ARTIST: Who does the city serve?

ENSEMBLE: Tell me. Tell me

REVEREND: (Spoken)

What in New Orleans did they begin building  
after the hurricane and not before?

CARPENTER: (Spoken)

the city is always being built  
in the image of the people building it.

REVEREND: (Spoken)

What in downtown Detroit did they begin building  
after the banks closed and not before?

CARPENTER: (Spoken)

and never it seems,  
in the image of the people already living in it.

REVEREND: (Spoken)

The body supposed to hold the spirit  
and the spirit hold the body

TURNER: (Spoken): in the image of the people building  
it.

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## 5. What's A City For?

REVEREND:

So if the people  
are the spirit of a city  
and the spirit is holding the body  
in the way the people hold for the city

I ask again:

What in this here city do the city hold for us?

What a city for without a people?

Who a ship serve if no one on board?

And if a ship empty, what the captain for?

Lord. Lord, Lord

ARTIST:

Can you hear it?

Can you hear it?

Can you hear it?

Can you hear it?

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## 6. The Artist's Aria - "Darkness"

ARTIST:

Darkness in the ground

Earth under my feet

Earth on my skin

Darkness on me

Darkness

I singin' to you

I live in a body with not enough dark in it

So I went down

in the ground

and dug a hole

to be found

and when it's me that I unearth

I'll dig my self on out.

Darkness in the ground

Earth over my feet

Earth over my skin

Darkness in me

Darkness

I singin to you

I live in a body with not enough dark in it

I'll dig out me

hold up the holes I have

to see

what might be found

from the time I breathed beneath...

I want my blood to pour out

To claw way for my soul out this ground

To hang down

my skin

and let the wind

make music through its holes.

To a place I've never known

That I can sing back to be better known

Same song

Same note

My body but an echo

of something bigger I know

Can you hear it?

Can I hear it?

A wound wants to breathe

A spirit wants to be seen

Close my eyes to better hear

the singing

Is my body an echo

of something bigger?

Can you hear it?

Can you hear it?

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## 7. Carpenter's Soliloquy

CARPENTER:

D'you know I never been to the ocean (ha!)

Lived this close to the coast my whole life

and never been\_\_\_\_\_

This city my cave

of air and wind (ha!)

Air and wind

These trees they mine

I don't own them

ARTIST:

(Tides\_\_\_\_\_)

CARPENTER:

but I tied to them

I say jokes on you—they wasn't even mine

How long till the ropes close

(Wooooo\_\_\_\_\_)

ARTIST:

(Can you say why?)

CARPENTER:

I didn't come to the castle

the castle came to me

(Wooo) when the king set fire to my tree (See\_\_?)

they say to me

We just trying to keep you warm

I say this while they make my body darker in the flame,  
(flame-flame-flame-flame)

See

the king a magician—

makes my body vanish

by making it garish (ha, ha)

Makes my body disappear

by letting it not be mine\_\_\_\_\_

just like these trees that mine but ain't

by making the idea of "mine" disappear

makes the mine gone, gone, (gone-gone-gone-gone-gone-gone...)

makes me a song, (song-song-song-song-song-song-song...)

in somebody else's mouth

what I wrote (wrote-wrote-wrote)

in someone else's throat (throat-throat-throat)

When they set my body on fire

they charge me for the smoke (smoke-smoke-smoke)

(Wok a wo mo sa neh say ka wa da)

say what?)

Split their fist on my face— (scat sing)

they get blood on they knuckles— (scat sing)

and tax me for the stain

Pulled the trick the same

way when it came

to these streets

—these homes

My man said soon as he sees

a white girl with a little dog

he know

his hood won't  
 be his much longer  
 Now I walk past another restaurant  
 outside with they pint glass  
 none say hello  
 when I pass  
 They refuse  
 to see me,  
 to touch me  
 cain't even allow me ground  
 to eat off of  
 earth to be  
 buried inside of  
 nothing can I own\_\_\_\_\_

not the home\_\_\_\_\_

not the city  
 shit  
 not even my heart  
 not my body not my skin  
 to whatever it be that my spirit  
 be tethered to—

if not even the anchoring body  
 is mine  
 what weight I have  
 to keep a soul (a soul)  
 here in this world  
 this life  
 —no anchor to the spirit  
 what am I?

ARTIST: A ghost?

CARPENTER: What am I?

ARTIST: Unseen?

CARPENTER: What am I?

ARTIST: Untouched

CARPENTER: What am I?

ARTIST: Nothing to hold.

ENSEMBLE: What the soul carries also carries the soul

CARPENTER: The soul its ocean, the soul in its hold.

CARPENTER/ENSEMBLE:

A stranger in my own home  
so they had to build another house

The spirit got took

While the body done stayed

Cuz they take

what you already done gave.

Always\_\_\_\_\_

I am learning

how to return

to that which we have never had

never known

Always I am returning with never arriving

which is the same as always leaving and never going

ARTIST: Never!

TURNER: Never!

REVEREND: Never!

ALL: Never!!

CARPENTER:

Makes my body disappear...

makes me a song in somebody else's mouth...

what I wrote in someone else's throat...

When they set my body on fire they charge me for the  
smoke (smoke-smoke-smoke)...

Pulled the trick the same...

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## 8. Ritual of the Stones

TURNER:

Call out to what once was

Call out to what is

Call out to what would be

May we make ourselves known to the Wound

May the Wound make it known to us.

TURNER:[Spoken]

Time don't go away simply because it has used days to

pass us

RETURNER:

It is not another place, not another country, not another  
land

Not even the other side of the river--

it's the river, and we in it

RETURNER:/ENSEMBLE:

Some of us only imagine

a body of water

as if it is only what is before us

and didn't actually go from one place

to another to become what it is

ARTIST: it's the river, and you're in it.

Can only can see the banks flanking them

Ignoring that there is a place

where the water begins

and that the water

has to have a place to go

a place...

where it leaves

the body of water we are in--

that we may become the body that we are.

ENSEMBLE:

The Wound is a river.

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RETURNER:

Call out to what once was.

May we make ourselves known to the Wound

May the Wound make it known to us.

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## 9. Reverend's Share

REVEREND:

We came from Louisiana.  
Alabama. Texas. Mississippi and Georgia.  
From elsewhere.  
And before there, from elsewhere.  
Back when the river flooded  
I got lost at first from my family  
helping some folks  
and then got trapped by the water coming in  
yelled for help and the water came into me  
Swallowed it down and couldn't breathe couldn't scream  
and then the water pushed me to some part of the ground  
that was higher  
So first the water chased me then drowned me and then  
saved me  
and doing so took my voice a spell  
I used to pray for God to bring my voice back to me  
and when it finally came home  
I gave it to him and to others  
by preaching the Word  
to the good and the not yet alike among us.  
Preached my throat raw some days but was always back  
come the morrow to greet the morn  
I wanted  
what I'd watched in those Kaiser yards—  
for us—Us—to be able to be  
together and make  
together  
that which is bigger  
than what our bodies be.  
Spent my whole life building this boat with others  
And now  
the boat empty but for me it seems  
And not for want—my people still there wanting and  
needing to be  
in this boat with me  
there just too much water between  
Water that others flooded on in  
The same water it seem as before—

water that gives the reason to build the boat  
 and water that keep the boat afloat  
 water that threaten to drown  
 and water that carry me out  
 The Wound is a river.  
 May we make ourselves known to the Wound  
 May the Wound make it known to us.

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## 10. Returner's Share

RETURNER:

They stood there at the door  
 and told us our home  
 was blighted  
 Our house right there—  
 right there where them tall blades touching the wind is  
 The hospital needed to be bigger  
 and so they and the government came  
 and knocked down some 400 houses and buildings  
 our house included.  
 and then didn't even use the earth from us  
 they took  
 They knocked down 400 homes  
 but was far bigger than that  
 and empty  
 all these years, and still empty.  
 the city men came  
 with their machines  
 and knocked  
 on the door  
 and said blighted  
 ---  
 ---even with those cherries bunched  
 full on the tree  
 and so sweet and  
 red as my blood the first time I fell  
 hard enough

to see what was in me

leak out my knee

--

still they stood there

and told us

and not just us, but this whole place, that house, our street

this neighborhood

was blighted

It was many houses

with many trees.

I said before it was right there

but truth told I cannot remember

where

She opens her hand and considers the stone again,  
momentarily. She closes her hand, turns it over and

lets the stone drop into the bucket. Its landing ripples.

The Wound is a river.

ENSEMBLE

The Wound is a river.

RETURNER:

May we make ourselves known to the Wound

May the Wound make it known to us.

Call out to what is.

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## 11. Artist's Share

ARTIST:

Here I am

covering myself with dirt

to make me--

all of me--dark enough

and all I really want...

I dug this hole

I always been digging a hole

to put myself into

It seems the only place I know

to find me and find others like me

So I do what I always done  
 ya dig?  
 And dug  
 Into the earth  
 and dug  
 into the hurt  
 and dug  
 to find something  
 that gave my hands  
 worth and purpose  
 And down  
 I went  
 into the ground of the earth  
 into the dark sound of the world's dark

ENSEMBLE:

Into the earth  
 and dug  
 into the hurt

ARTIST:

I went into this earth that my ancestors might  
 --even if in their mouth--  
 hold me  
 And there in the dark  
 the dreams come as they always do--  
 One night I had a dream  
 of my mama's granddaddy  
 having never even known him  
 and in the dream he was trapped in the train car he used  
 to work  
 but where the white folk were dining  
 and they had sat him down like he was one of em  
 and they put a plate before him  
 covered  
 and they lifted the lid  
 and there was a pair of black hands cooked on the plate  
 and he looked at his wrists  
 and yup his hands were gone  
 and they had served his own hands to him

and he was so hungry and his hands was all he had to eat  
 and he so hungry  
 was ready to do it too  
 but he couldn't even cut the hands up —couldn't hold a  
 fork and knife  
 couldn't even lift his hands to his mouth  
 so he bent down  
 like a dog  
 to take the hands by the mouth  
 like a dog  
 and all those people in the car laughing at him  
 like a dog

ENSEMBLE:

How people gonna starve a someone  
 and then punish them for being hungry?

ARTIST:

—and here I am

ENSEMBLE:

Here you are

ARTIST:

covering myself with dirt

ARTIST:

to make me—all of me —dark enough

Can I be

REVEREND

All of me!

RETURNER

Dark enough!

ARTIST:

And now the dark of the body

ENSEMBLE:

The dark of the body

ARTIST:

become tied to the dark of the heart—

ENSEMBLE:

the dark of the heart

CARPENTER:

that if the second ain't been dipped in the ink,

ALL:

the body ain't dark enough

CARPENTER

And if the first was birthed in the black

then we think the heart need to be just as black —

ARTIST:

—-and here I am

covering myself with dirt

to make me—

all of me—dark enough

ENSEMBLE:

Into the earth

into the hurt

CARPENTER

Like I don't know what I ever had or hadn't

Done or had don to me.

Covering myself with dirt to make me dark enough.

ARTIST:

and all I really want is to be enough

He drops the stone into the bucket. It ripples.

TURNER:

The Wound is a river.

ENSEMBLE

The Wound is a river.

TURNER:

May we make ourselves known to the Wound

May the Wound make it known to us.

Call out to what would be.

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## 12. Carpenter's Share

CARPENTER:

I'm just a ghost.

My niggas made me a fucking ghost.  
 My nigga killed me.  
 And then my nigga killed me  
 and then another nigga killed me  
 and another  
 and another and  
 another—so many of my niggas  
 killing me  
 cuz every time one of them died it killed me again  
 and I couldn't hear it couldn't see it at first  
 so many of us dying and killing  
 And then I realized—  
 they aint trying to kill us, they don't want us dead they  
 don't care bout that.  
 It would be one thing  
 if they were just trying to always kill us but they want us  
 here  
 they want our bodies—they want our bodies but not the  
 life not the spirit  
 —so they can have us do and be what THEY want  
 do what THEY need  
 and they can stay out the water  
 out this river  
 on the banks and dry  
 living the lives they live  
 They want us alive but not living  
 They want us dead but not gone  
 So for every one of us that did get dead and gone they get  
 more of us that dead and still here  
 And every time one of us gets gone  
 it kills another one of us.  
 And another.  
 And another.  
 And another  
 and another and another and another and another—  
 REVEREND:  
 —But you are still here  
 CARPENTER:

In what way!

Because my body before you?

It aint mine!

TURNER:

It is.

That's just what they have us thinking

As you said—they want our bodies

and they get em by making us think our bodies is unwanted

CARPENTER:

And it works. I dont want this body.

They got us bleeding and wounded and wounding each  
other

so we become nothing and they can just take us—

REVEREND:

But that body is still here—

CARPENTER:

—Shit. This body? This body??

This body nothing.

This body nothing but a hole

I been dyed

In death

So many times

My whole body a wound

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### 13. The Dance of White

TURNER:

May we make ourselves known to the Wound

May the Wound make it known to us

REVEREND: What does he say?

TURNER: I don't know

CARPENTER: I don't know

REVEREND: I don't know

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### 14. White's Transmission

I think

I think

I think he says:

"In the dark I came

to the castle

and the castle was empty

So I went back into the dark

and then back

to the castle and knock again

and again

back

into the dark

"I didn't come to the castle, the castle came to me

"Because I am alone they take me for stone

"I didn't come to the castle, the castle comes to me

use me to build the castle bigger

"My song I

song

I am song

trying to find the way back through itself

to find the mouth I fell from

"The ocean stays chained to the shore always thrown

out and pulled back and thrown

again

"What side of the rowing do we live on

"Lord

like the shore itself

my heart is

"The castle cast me out my own castle

made me sleep in the fields

Then built walls in my field and sealed me outside the  
walls

In the sweet of evening

not knowing I was the song

I longed for the song

"The body that made me

an echo

of something bigger

"I saw myself as the echo

but the body that made me song  
 was the echo  
 of something bigger  
 "So many homes  
 made kindling of me  
 "In the length of day and in the sweet of evening I looked  
 down at the river  
 In the night the river shines  
 with the light of the heavens  
 shone  
 like a bone  
 with no body  
 I sat my body in the river  
 I was the river  
 like the shore itself  
 my body is  
 the water  
 my heart is  
 I am the river  
 You are in me  
 in my heart  
 Even when you are not  
 You are  
 In the night  
 the stars  
 in the river  
 shine and the river is full  
 of the stars  
 full  
 "of a body I sat  
 with the body a body wants  
 the river  
 its river to sit itself down..."  
 RETURNER  
 The wound.  
 The river. You are the wound and the river.

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## 15. Returner's Prayer

RETURNER/ENSEMBLE:

Light a flame and call to the Spirits  
 May we make ourselves known to the wound  
 Lay down the earth of the homeland  
 May we make ourselves known  
 A field here where once a house was  
 May we undress and clothe again  
 May we clothe in something else and then  
 Call out to what once was  
 Call out to what is  
 May the river be wet on our skin  
 Call out to what would be  
 May we make ourselves known to ourselves  
 May we undress and clothe again  
 May we clothe in something else and then  
 May the river be wet on our skin  
 May it be loud, like our laughter  
 May we step out, upon its banks  
 May the sun dry us with its warmth  
 And may we marvel.  
 A Field here  
 Where once a house was  
 May we clothe in something else and then  
 May we step out, upon its bank  
 A pause. Characters speak, no music.

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## 16. Epilogue

REVEREND:

It's a long hard river  
 all us wet in

RETURNER:

A long hard river  
 all us wet in  
 --whether wading

REVEREND

Whether wading  
or water up to the chin

TURNER:

or water up to the chin  
but we all in this river

THE OTHERS [not in sync but echoing each other in  
agreement]

We all in this river

TURNER: This river of blood and haints

ARTIST: some of us in at our ankles

REVEREND: some of us up to our waists

CARPENTER: some of us are in the water up to our necks

TURNER:some of us are under

CARPENTER: some of us are under

REVEREND:

some of us are under

and some of us pulled from the shore

TURNER: And some of us that are under have been  
pulled to the shore

ARTIST: Pulled to the shore

CARPENTER: Pulled to the shore

TURNER: But they got us all in it

CARPENTER: all of us are in it up to our skin

ARTIST:

All of us are in it up to our skin

trying to touch bottom

and sometimes

we pull each other further in

REVEREND: we pull each other further in

TURNER: dragged by the current

REVEREND: dragged by the current

TURNER:

Swallowed by the wound's water

forever gone

CARPENTER:

Gone

Forever

TURNER:

To be part of that which  
the rest of us are standing in

REVEREND: If the body the vessel

TURNER:

If the body the vessel  
and the body the only vessel we have  
to remain afloat  
in this river then

ARTIST: then

CARPENTER: then

REVEREND: Then

TURNER: The river is ours

THE OTHERS

The river is ours

CARPENTER

--and

--but

--then

--and--

if the river  
is that which keeps  
the boat afloat  
and if the river is  
that which  
puts the hole in the boat  
and the river is  
in itself the very holes in the vessel  
and the blood that fills them  
and the blood that pours out  
then how  
how are we to  
how are we to  
how  
how are we  
how are we to