

## ABYSS

"Abyss" is the musical setting of a sestina by violinist and poet Louisa Bieler who studied poetry with Pew Award winning poet Nathalie Anderson and is published in "Small Craft Warnings" and "Ourstory." It exists at an intersection of Western individualist art and traditional Jewish sacred music at a point of entry that anyone living in the modern world can access.

We are attempting to express the destruction of our shared consciousness in a time of extreme chaos and pandemic. The hollowed-out shell of our democracy is collapsing under the weight of the attack on our constitution and democratic tradition plus worldwide disease. Creative impulses to take shards of this destruction to form a vessel flexible enough to contain the positive and negative impulses unleashed in such dark times inspire me to compose work reflective of past injustices to transform inequity into the recreation of the soul.

Our audience consists of anyone who entered this country as immigrants or had parents who immigrated to this country. The lost souls who abandoned home and country, driven out by pestilence, famine, gangs—both governmental and street gangs, tribal warfare, death of loved ones, holocaust—came to this country to live and create a future for themselves and their children in an atmosphere of equal opportunity and the myth of belonging. We will have succeeded when audiences reconnect with their ancestral past and recent histories.

Musically, the piece has been inspired by multiple influences. There is a centuries-long Western musical tradition expressing "Lamentations" stretching back to the Middle-Ages. Thus listeners can find referents to Hebrew, liturgical cantillation, baroque and Gregorian chanting, as well as to jazz-inflected harmony. It follows in the tradition of my latest piece, "Qabbala::Entanglement."

Written for eight voices--soprano, alto, tenor, and bass—and string orchestra composed of two violins, two violas, and two cellos, "Abyss" quotes the six verses from "Lamentations," third chapter of the book of "Eicho," set in Hebrew. At times both Hebrew and the English of the sestina are being sung simultaneously in different keys to support one another. This musically introduces a bi-tonal juxtaposition of scale and emotion. With Hebrew cantillation vocalists sing not on pitch or in time but rather in an idiosyncratic manner reminiscent of the sound I heard in the Orthodox synagogue my father brought me to where individuals of the congregation chanted at their own pace in their own pitches--it is that sound I am attempting to replicate.