

A Call for the Battle To Cease  
Program Note

Over the last 20 years, Ed Polochick has been for me the kind of collaborator composers dream about. With his wonderful orchestra in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 2002 he conducted my piece for organ and large orchestra, *In the Fullness of Time*. In 2006 he commissioned me to compose *Epiphanies* for string quartet and orchestra, which Lincoln's Symphony premiered that year. He has also mounted a stirring performance of my *Mass* for chorus, organ and percussion while we were both colleagues at the Peabody Conservatory.

Temperamentally, he is a musician who completely gets what I am trying to accomplish as a composer, and who has the great musicianship to project my work on both ensemble and audience. So when Ed asked my wife and muse Victoria Sirota to write a text for a new work he wanted me to compose to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Concert Artists of Baltimore, I was immediately energized by the prospect of working with him again. And things only got better from there.

Ed asked me to write the piece for solo piano, choir and orchestra, using the same instrumentation as the Beethoven Choral Fantasy, which would also be on the program. I liked the idea of a companion work to the Beethoven. Then he told me that Simone Dinnerstein would be the pianist! I have known Simone since she was 12 years old, and I had been looking for an opportunity to compose something especially for her profoundly individual and emotionally layered interpretive gifts.

And so this project took flight as a lively conversation among loving friends. We agreed that the text must address, in Beethovenian terms, the need for us to transcend the divisions of race, nationality, class and politics that tear at the fabric of our common humanity. What Vicki came up with is stunning in its straightforward simplicity:

*A Call for the Battle to Cease*

*How can we love, when love is drowned?  
When hatred screams so loud?  
When mindless fear takes hold and rules the land,  
And anger grips the crowd?*

*May we have the courage to be the ones  
Who make the battle cease.  
We'll sing the songs of love and hope throughout the world,  
And stand as one for peace.*

*Rejoice in the gift of our differences!  
And see in the eyes of each other  
The spark of revelation, the joy of God's creation!  
O gift of life! O wonder!*

Victoria Sirota  
26 January 2016

The music has risen naturally out of this text, and out of my relationships with Vicki, Ed, and Simone. As I let their humanity speak to me, I have found the ideas coming to me unforced and complete. The challenge has been in putting those ideas together so that they constitute a real narrative arc. The key phrase that has guided me is:

*Rejoice in the gift of our differences!*

This is not a call for mere tolerance or for peaceful coexistence, but rather the triumphant assertion that it is our very diversity that gives joy and meaning to our lives together.

*O gift of life! O wonder!*

Robert Sirota