

Owain Park – *Footsteps*
A companion piece to Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles*

A note from Owain:

"I was so excited to be asked by Nigel to write a piece for Tenebrae to be performed alongside Path of Miracles. Tenebrae's recording of Joby's piece is one of my absolute favourites; I remember being bowled over by the instrumental quality of the opening, and then the combination of ancient chant and the composer's own modern voice. When I met with Nigel we spoke about the possibilities for this new work; it would need to be much shorter than Path of Miracles, but hopefully contain many complimentary themes, namely travel, solitude and journeying.

Whilst it is possible for Footsteps to be performed by Tenebrae alone, Nigel wanted a work that could also cater for additional forces – from single line children's choir right through to an expert semi-chorus. I can't wait for the work to be performed across the world by Tenebrae with other artists drawn from the towns and cities in which the performances take place.

Footsteps is the result of many months of researching texts to structure a narrative that cycles the seasons through the view of a lonely traveller who is constantly being moved on before being allowed to settle, finding comfort in the sky and stars above."



LISTEN OUT FOR

See how Owain incorporates Joby's technique of modernising ancient chant in *Footsteps*: **Tenors and Basses, bars 55 – 82.**

Footsteps – A more detailed guide

OPENING TO FIGURE B

The first sonorities of Park's *Footsteps* evolve from a middle C, (perhaps an almost literal allusion to 'Sea Pearl?'), however all is not as it seems as chromatic notes are gradually added in the upper registers, creating an unworldly picture.

REFERENCE: b.10 onwards sees C#s, F#s, G#s and D#s pervade the texture in all parts.

Long phrases in the upper voices of the semi-chorus are repeated in diminution in the main choir, this melodic idea becoming the crux of the opening's harmony as Bb major and A major sound together - keys separated by a semitone and colliding at different registers.

FIGURES B - E

The main choir opens this second section with energetic statements in the upper voices, proclaiming 'I praise the disk of the rising sun' in an ostinato figure. Meanwhile, the lower voices chant in homophony 'Where every bird is bold to go'; meters collide as the lower voices slow minim pulse rocks against the faster-moving quavers above.

'The foreigner before he knocks' heralds a sudden shift in texture as the two upper parts are left exposed, hovering on a major third and highlighting the last line of the stanza 'Must thrust the tears away' which is uttered in the lower voices.

REFERENCE: b.74 – 82 The main choir subsides at the end of their phrase in bar 78, leaving us with only the two soprano lines.

An alto soloist introduces a new melody on the words 'Time to leave' which is then imitated in the semi-chorus and joined by high sopranos sirening in thirds above.

FIGURES E - K

The semi-chorus now take over and lead us into Autumn with a wistful soprano melody as our traveller is disturbed by the wind. We are wrenched out of this lull by a miniature fugue inspired by William Walton.

REFERENCE b.102 – 113 perhaps the lower voice entries building upwards and the rocking change in tempo echoes that of Walton's well-loved anthem 'The Twelve'?

LISTEN OUT FOR

WITHOUT LOOKING AT THE SCORE: Can you determine the two time signatures which make up the fugue subject?

References to the 'pilgrim track' and 'belting zodiac' charge us forward with driving momentum, yet this seemingly set course is quickly undone as single pitch repeating ostinato rhythms begin to pervade the texture, around which three-part harmonies weave. These ostinato rhythms come to rest by working their way down the octave to reside on a chord with mixed major-minor modality.

REFERENCE: b.164 sees B flats and B naturals sound together, creating a sense of uncertainty as to whether we are in G major or G minor.

Gabriel Crouch writes on Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles*: "The insistent discords of the second movement reflect...the hardships of the road". Park quotes these chords briefly on the words 'And, never as yet a' before journeying in to new colours and harmonies on 'tinct of spring'.

LISTEN OUT FOR

Can you hear the *Path of Miracles* quotation in Park's score? **Bars 166 - 168**

This section closes with the semi-chorus who bid "Farewell" to Autumn with an wistful, yearning interjection including allusions to the Tristan chord.

REFERENCE: The soprano entry on the second beat of b.188 alludes to the Tristan chord, but the alto C# means it is not realised.

FIGURES K – N

The interval of a tri-tone, the devil's interval, outlines the melody for next section which builds in counterpoint from the low basses upwards, capturing the idea of gusts of wind through flowing compound time quavers using the octatonic scale. A more gentle section ensues, with lilting leaves gently falling, as the tri-tone transforms from a pivot point to the raised fourth in a major scale.

REFERENCE: Could this section be compared to the octatonic final 'Amen's of the Nunc Dimittis in Kenneth Leighton's Second Service?

The chords are not grounded as root positions, but appear in second and first inversions, not allowing the harmony to completely settle until the open fifth on "midnight". The unison alto and bass melody circles inside the fifth, once again using the octatonic scale. As the moonlight shines on St. Paul's, the upper voices melody echoes the opening of the work, with the interval of a seventh prominent alongside distant non-harmony notes.

FIGURES N - Q

A bass soloist intrudes on this reverie with a second exclamation of 'Time to leave', this time in a lower key than the first over a low bass drone. Again, the semichorus repeat the material, and the soprano sirens extend upwards before retreating to a new harmony for "The cherry blossoms".

REFERENCE: b.235 hears the work move in to B minor for the first time

This chorale-like texture is intimate, delicate and tinged with sadness as four-part chords with a descending contour in the main choir are refuted by an upward-moving soprano soloist, who concludes this section with her own rendition of the main theme.

LISTEN OUT FOR

See how Park quotes the opening melody of the work in the soprano solo at **bars 250 – 253**.

FIGURES Q – END

'Holy paths' pays homage to John Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple* in its scale, scope and unrelenting praise for the divine. A little of his language features in the climax of this section, as parallel chords with scalic melodies form the bedrock around which quavers flow in contrary motion.

REFERENCE: b.254 – 270 Park sets undulating scalar compound quaver movement against duple time melodies which grow to a climax.

As the opening ideas of the work return, we hear an altered sound-world, with the use of D major in addition to the white notes of C major. A lyrical soprano melody leads into the final few phrases, with the harmony evoking the unfinished dominant seventh as the footsteps are left continuing.