

FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE & PERTH FESTIVAL PRESENT

TED HEARNE'S KATRINA BALLADS

THU 15 FEB 2018 | 8PM

Katrina Ballads is a 60-minute oratorio – the libretto comprising entirely primary-source texts from the week following Hurricane Katrina; the words of survivors, relief workers, politicians and celebrities, all originally broadcast on national media, and an accompanying film by Bill Morrison repurposes news clips and source footage of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast after the hurricane, into a visual world that is both slowly undulating in its texture and highly narrative.

It's beyond exciting to be bringing this work to Western Australia – the first audience in the Southern Hemisphere. I wrote Katrina Ballads in 2007 because I didn't know how else to confront the awakening of helplessness and dread that came after witnessing, as a privileged young person watching from New York City, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina shine a light on racism, economic inequality, political cowardice and the forces that perpetuate these things in my country.

I'm curious to see how this perspective, a snapshot from a very particular place and time, resonates a decade later, on the other side of the world, in a place and time that nonetheless grapples with the same issues in only slightly different ways.

– Ted Hearne

KATRINA BALLADS PROGRAMME

1. Prelude: ‘keeping its head above water’ – mezzo-soprano solo with vocal ensemble

New Orleans is sinking.

And its main buffer from a hurricane, the protective Mississippi River delta, is quickly eroding away, leaving the historic city perilously close to disaster. So vulnerable, in fact, that earlier this year the Federal Emergency Management Agency ranked the potential damage to New Orleans as among the three likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country. The other two? A massive earthquake in San Francisco, and almost prophetically, a terrorist attack on New York City. The New Orleans scenario may be the deadliest of all.

In the face of an approaching storm... the city’s less-than-adequate evacuation routes would probably kill one of 10 left behind as the city drowned under 20 feet of water. The toll would be shattering. The Big Easy might never recover. It’s been 36 years since Hurricane Betsy buried New Orleans 8 feet deep.

‘To some extent, I think we’ve been lulled to sleep,’ (said Marc Levitan, Director of Louisiana State University’s hurricane center.)

– Eric Berger, *The Houston Chronicle* (12.1.01)

2. “when we awoke, it was to that familiar phrase: New Orleans dodged a bullet” – horn solo with electronics

– Pamela Davidson-Ehlers (American Federation of Government Employees)

3. Hardy Jackson: 8.30.05 – baritone solo with vocal ensemble

My wife, I can’t find her body, she gone. The house just split in half. We got up the roof and the water came and just opened up, divided. I held her hand tight as I could and she told me ‘you can’t hold me.’ She said, ‘take care of the kids and the grandkids’. My wife, I can’t find her body, she gone.

– Hardy Jackson (resident of Biloxi, MS), on ABC Television

Interlude 1 – soprano solo

4. Dennis Hastert: 8.31.05

‘How do you go about rebuilding this city? It doesn’t make sense to me. It looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed. And it’s a question we certainly should ask’.

–Dennis E. Hastert (R-IL), Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

5. Bridge to Gretna

There is a bridge on the Pontchartrain Expressway, leading across the Mississippi River from the city of New Orleans to the neighboring “west bank” suburb of Gretna. Armed police from Gretna stood guard on the bridge for days, preventing a growing number of desperate and stranded people from escaping to safety. Among many other frightening details, witnesses describe being shot at by Gretna police and told by the sheriff: ‘We are not turning the west bank into another Superdome.’

6. Anderson Cooper and Mary Landrieu: 9.1.05 – soprano and baritone duet with vocal ensemble

COOPER: Senator, appreciate you joining us tonight. Does the federal government bear responsibility for what is happening now? Should they apologize for what is happening now?

LANDRIEU: Anderson, there will be plenty of time to discuss all of those issues, about why, and how, and what, and if. But, Anderson, as you understand, and all of the producers and directors of CNN, and the news networks, this situation is very serious and it’s going to demand all of our full attention through the hours, through the nights, through the days.

Let me just say a few things. Thank President Clinton and former President Bush for their strong statements of support and comfort today. I thank all the leaders that are coming to Louisiana, and Mississippi, and Alabama to our help and rescue. We are grateful for the military assets that are being brought to bear. I want to thank Senator Frist and Senator Reid for their extraordinary efforts. Anderson, tonight, I don’t know if you’ve heard – maybe you all have announced it – but Congress is going to an unprecedented session to pass a \$10 billion supplemental bill tonight to keep FEMA and the Red Cross up and operating.

COOPER: Excuse me, Senator, I’m sorry for interrupting. I haven’t heard that, because, for the last four days, I’ve been seeing dead bodies in the streets here in Mississippi. And to listen to politicians thanking each other and complimenting each other, you know, I got

to tell you, there are a lot of people here who are very upset, and very angry, and very frustrated. And when they hear politicians... thanking one another, it just... it kind of cuts them the wrong way right now, because literally there was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats because this woman had been laying in the street for 48 hours. And there’s not enough facilities to take her up.

Do you get the anger that is out here?

LANDRIEU: Anderson, Anderson... I have the anger inside of me. Most of the homes in my family have been destroyed. Our homes have been destroyed...

COOPER: Well, who are you angry at?

LANDRIEU: I’m not angry at anyone.

COOPER: ..But this seems to be the time and place.

LANDRIEU: Anderson, I know. And I know where you are. And I know what you’re seeing. Believe me, we know it. And we understand, and there will be a time to talk about all of that. Trust me. Nobody’s perfect, Anderson. Everybody has to stand up here... But I want to thank the President. He will be here tomorrow, we think.

7. “Brownie you’re doin’ a heck of a job.” – tenor solo

– George W . Bush (9.2.05), spoken to Michael Brown (head of FEMA)

Interlude 2 – trumpet solo

8. Barbara Bush: 9.5.05 – mezzo soprano solo

‘Almost everyone I’ve talked to says, “We’re moving to Houston.” What I’m hearing which is sort of scary is they all want to stay in Texas. Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in this arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this – this (chuckle) is working very well for them.’

– Former first lady Barbara Bush, at the Houston Astrodome

9. Kanye West: 9.2.05 – tenor solo with vocal ensemble

‘I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says “they’re looting.” You see a white family, it says “they’re looking for food.” And you know it’s been five days because most of the people are black. And even for me to complain about it, I would be a hypocrite because I’ve tried to turn away from the

teacher – the T.V. – because it’s too hard to watch. I’ve even been shopping before even giving a donation and now I’m calling my business manager to see what is the biggest amount I can give, and just to imagine if I was down there, and those are my people down there. So anybody out there that wants to do anything that we can help – with the way America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible. I mean the Red Cross is doing everything they can. We already realize a lot of people that could help are at war right now, fighting another way – and they’ve given them permission to go down and shoot us!’

George Bush doesn’t care about black people. – Kanye West, on NBC’s live telethon for Katrina relief

10. Ashley Nelson – soprano solo

‘I thought I was gonna die. I mean, I look at it like this, now. 9-11 was bad cause it was terrorists, you know, it’s no surprise people hate the United States. It’s no big surprise. I mean, but New Orleans was worse, because it was our own government who betrayed us. *They betrayed us*. Like, they left us there to die.

You know what it’s like to not have water? You get a taste in your mouth that’s just, aw, it’s horrible. Your mouth all dry and you can’t even think right. You start getting delusional and hallucinating about things.... Water bottles. More water bottles. Big Kentwood gallon jugs. I’m serious. I went crazy. I mean, I would just sit down and rock and think, “is the world going to turn to hell and we all gonna burn?”

And then you hear George Bush telling the FEMA man, “you’re doing a good job,” – what do you mean by that? What do you mean by that? Because I mean, people are dying, so you telling him he’s doing a good job, what you’re saying, like, that’s good that people are dying? I never understood that and I really wish I can meet him to ask him, “what do you mean by that? ‘He’s doing a good job.’

– Ashley Nelson, 18, resident of Lafitte housing projects, New Orleans. Taken from an interview on NPR’s *This American Life* (airdate: 9.9.05)

Performers

Composer/Conductor/Tenor II	Ted Hearne (USA)
Soprano	Fiona McAndrew (PER)
Mezzo	Caitlin Cassidy (PER)
Tenor I	Isaiah Robinson (USA)
Baritone	Kristin Bowtell (PER)
Flutes	Emily Clements (PER)
Clarinets	Ashley Smith (PER)
Trumpet	Tristram Williams (MEL)
Horn	Ysolt Clark (BNE)
Violins	Semra Lee-Smith (PER)
Viola	Kathy Potter (PER)
Cello	Matthew Hoy (MEL)
Electric Guitar	Alistair McLean (MEL)
Bass Guitar	Sam Anning (MEL)
Piano	Gladys Chua (PER)
Drums/Percussion	Ron Wiltrout (USA)

Technical Credits

Producer	Marcus Dickson
Sound Engineer	Simon Keet
Lighting and Projection	Aidan d' Adhemar
Electronic Processing	James Ledger

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