

QUEEN OF HEAVEN
FOR PIANO AND ELECTRONICS

A DISSERTATION IN
Music Composition

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by
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QUEEN OF HEAVEN
FOR PIANO AND ELECTRONICS

Scott Peter Blasco for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree

University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011

ABSTRACT

Queen of Heaven is a large-scale composition for piano and electronics, cast as five meditations on the Virgin Mary. Each of the five movements is set in musical materials that both subjectively and symbolically express the composer's study and experience of scriptural, liturgical and iconographic sources relating to different aspects of her unique place in Christian theology.

The first movement, "Hail, Holy Queen," imagines the greeting of the Virgin by the hosts of angels, in enormous, sonorous and terrifying voices. The second and fourth movements each take their inspiration from titles for Mary: "Full-of-Grace" from *kecharitomene*, the Greek word of greeting spoken by the Archangel Gabriel in Luke 1:28; and "The-One-Who-Gives-Birth-To-God" from *Theotokos*, an ancient liturgical and devotional epithet. These two are divided by "The Unburnt Bush," based on iconographic and liturgical sources that celebrate the prefiguration of the Virgin in the burning bush of Exodus. The fifth and final movement returns to the heavenly setting of the first, drawing its imagery from Revelation 12: "And a great sign

appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

The electronic sounds in *Queen of Heaven* consist of both triggered sound files and live processing of the piano. One of the composer’s goals in constructing these sounds was to combine the reliability of fixed media electronics with the performative flexibility and spontaneity possible with live-generated sound and processing. The sound files for the first and third movements allow for flexibility in pacing for the pianist by using sounds whose textures imply no particular metric stresses, and whose duration is such to allow a wide flexibility of tempo for the pianist. This model is broken by the explicitly metric character of the electronic sound in the fifth movement, which is designed for the pianist to be able to follow easily without the use of a click track.

Queen of Heaven was commissioned by pianist Kari Johnson, and is dedicated to the Most Holy God-Bearer and Ever-Virgin Mary.

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance, have examined a thesis titled “Queen of Heaven,” presented by Scott Peter Blasco, candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

James Mobberley, DMA, Committee Chair
Conservatory of Music and Dance

Paul Rudy, DMA
Conservatory of Music and Dance

Chen Yi, DMA
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I would like to thank Dr. James Mobberley for his perceptiveness and patience in our conversations about *Queen of Heaven*, for the great encouragement he has continually offered over the course of its completion, and for his obvious passion for teaching. To Dr. Paul Rudy, thanks are due for his encouragement to pursue aesthetic directions without regard for their popularity, constant encouragement and urging toward excellence in creative work, and collaborative spirit; to Dr. Chen Yi, for passing on to her students her freedom in musical cross-pollination and her razor-sharp eye for detail; to Dr. Matthew Burtner, for pushing me to stretch myself beyond familiar avenues of musical expression; and to Dr. S. Andrew Granade, for sharing his love for and enormous knowledge of contemporary music, and for being a historian truly invested in the here and now of music.

Queen of Heaven would not have been written at all had it not been for the commission and enthusiastic support of Dr. Kari Johnson, with whom I look forward to further collaboration in the future.

A debt of gratitude unpayable is owed to my wife, Tracy, for years of love, patience, and support as I worked through the process that has brought me to the completion of this degree. Thank you to my son, Jack, whose arrival slowed my progress to a joyous near-standstill. Thank you to the Blasco and Young families for encouragement of and support for my work (both moral and financial) when my own energy lagged—especially to Katie, for recognizing early on that *Queen of Heaven* “are very good musics.”

To the Most Holy Godbearer and Ever-Virgin Mary

SCOTT BLASCO

QUEEN OF HEAVEN

FOR PIANO AND ELECTRONICS

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QUEEN OF HEAVEN FOR PIANO AND ELECTRONICS

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. Revelation 12:1

The Blessed Virgin Mary has been an object of devotion and a source of comfort and inspiration to Christians from the earliest years of their history. Throughout this time, many artists and musicians have dedicated their efforts to her reverence, adding their voices to the generations who have ever called her “blessed.”

Each of the five movements of *Queen of Heaven* is in a sense conceived as an icon: each concerns itself with a single idea, turning it over and over, meditating on it from different angles. The first movement, “Hail, Holy Queen,” imagines the greeting of the Virgin by the hosts of angels, in enormous, sonorous and terrifying voices like immense chimes. The second and fourth movements each take their inspiration from titles for Mary: “Full-of-Grace” from *kecharitomene*, the Greek word of greeting spoken by the Archangel Gabriel in Luke 1:28; and “The-One-Who-Gives-Birth-To-God” from *Theotokos*, an ancient Mariological title used in liturgical contexts. These two are divided by “The Unburnt Bush,” based on an icon of the same title that connects the Virgin and the burning bush of Exodus, as expressed in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: “Let us honor the Pure Theotokos! She accepted the Fire of Divinity in her womb but was not consumed!” The fifth and final movement returns to the heavenly setting of the first, now drawing its imagery from Revelation 12: “And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Queen of Heaven was commissioned by pianist Kari Johnson, and is dedicated to the Most Holy God-Bearer and Ever-Virgin Mary.

DURATION: c.24 minutes

SCOTT BLASCO is a composer and sound artist currently residing in Pullman, Washington. He is a board member of the Kansas City Electronic Music and Arts Alliance (KcEMA) and a founding member of the Kansas City-area electroacoustic new music ensemble The Digital Honkbox Revival. Scott teaches composition, theory, and electronic music at Washington State University. He is currently a doctoral candidate in music composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and holds degrees in music from Western Michigan University and Calvin College and in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, where he studied theology and the arts.

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

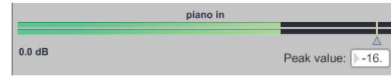
Boxed numbers throughout the score indicate the CUE (shown in the drop-down menu in the software) to be triggered using the spacebar. Boxed letter F indicates a resonance effect to be triggered where it appears by pressing the letter F on the computer keyboard. A planned update to the software will allow the pianist to operate the electronic sounds by footpedal.

AUDIO SETUP

INPUT

The QUEEN OF HEAVEN software is designed to receive a stereo signal from the piano, either directly into a digital audio interface or from an aux send on an external mixer. Regardless of which method is used, set up piano audio following these steps:

1. Check the **DSP SETTINGS** (using the “DSP” button in the top left of the screen) to make sure the desired audio device is selected.
2. Turn on audio using the drop-down menu in the top left of the screen. Monitor the “**PIANO IN**” meter (pictured at right) while the pianist plays a loud section of the piece (measures 40-41, for example). Adjust the triangle slider up or down until the level peaks as close to 0.0dB as possible. This should assure a good mix between piano and electronic sounds.
3. Set the **REVERB MIX** (at the top of the screen) to the desired mixture level. The default is 20%, but less may be desirable, especially in more reverberant spaces. (Note: the reverb applies only to output bus 1— see below)

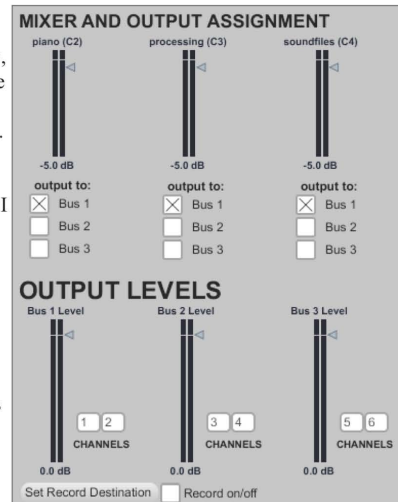


OUTPUT

The software also offers three stereo output buses for flexibility in routing for performance or recording. Each sound source (live piano, processing applied to the live piano, and triggered soundfiles) can be sent to any of the buses by selecting the desired bus beneath each volume slider in the **MIXER AND OUTPUT ASSIGNMENT** box.

The levels for each sound source in this box can be adjusted at any time with a mouse or by using a MIDI controller. To set up for MIDI controller, click the “Map Controllers” button near the top of the screen and follow the instructions available from the window to assign the desired MIDI controller numbers to Control Indices 2, 3, and 4 (C2, C3, and C4 in the slider names).

The three **OUTPUT BUSES** default to channels 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6, respectively. To change these settings, click on the channel numbers to the right of each output level slider and select the desired channels.



TO RECORD A PERFORMANCE, click “Set Record Destination” and navigate to the location the recording should be saved. The software will record the outputs of all three buses, regardless of whether any audio is being sent to them, and will generate a 6-channel audio file that can be edited and mixed using an audio editing program such as Audacity or Peak. Recording begins as soon as the “Record on/off” box is checked.

Version 2 of this software was built in Max/MSP version 5.1.7 in September 2011. If you are unable to run the application for some reason, please contact the composer at scottblasco@gmail.com for an updated version.

commissioned by Kari Johnson
dedicated to the Most Holy God-Bearer and Ever-Virgin Mary

QUEEN OF HEAVEN

for piano and electronics

*Regina caeli, laetare, alleluia:
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia,
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia,
Ora pro nobis deum, alleluia.*

Queen of Heaven rejoice- alleluia!
For He whom you did merit to bear- alleluia!
Has risen, as He said. Alleluia!
Pray for us to God. Alleluia!

Regina Caeli (Gregorian Eastertide anthem) Scott Blasco

(b. 1978)

I. Hail, Holy Queen! (Angelic greeting of the Mother of God)

Fast, fiery yet solemn (♩ = c. 180-200)

The musical score is written for piano and electronics. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a piano (p) dynamic, followed by a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. A first ending bracket (x7) is marked with the instruction "(c. 9-12'') (speeding and slowing dramatically at irregular intervals)". A second ending bracket (x7) is marked "simile". A "Ped." (pedal) marking is present under measure 1. The second system (measures 5-7) starts with a forte (f) dynamic and ends with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The third system (measures 8-9) starts with a forte (f) dynamic and ends with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The fourth system (measures 10-12) starts with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic, then a piano (p) dynamic, and ends with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic. A "slowing, gradual decres." instruction is placed over the final measures. A final dynamic marking of mezzo-forte (mf) is shown at the bottom of the page.

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Slower, liturgical (♩=108-120) (approximate durations)

14

fp *fp* *fp*

13

mf *fp*

18

fp *f* *mf* even and deliberate

* see note (below)

14

f *p*

21

23

p *mp* *p* (as if distant, but clear)

4-6"

15

mp

* keep eighth-note groupings internally even, but allow for a bit of rhythmic space between groups so as not to rush the grace notes.

2

27 *simile*

30 *p* *pp* like an echo *f* *pp* (wait for silence)

4-6" 2-5" 8^{va}

16 *mp* *pp*

35 *ff* *f* *ff* *ff* *ff*

ff *f* *ff* *ff* *ff*

ff *f* *ff* *ff* *ff*

17 *f* *ff*

37 *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

ff *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

ff *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

18 *ff*

39

ff

19

41

43

f accel.

ff rallentando

8^{va} loco

20

21

22

23

24

ff

f

Slower (♩ = 72-78)

mf 7:4 sim. 6:4 5:4

P20

25

p

48

Tempo I

(speeding and slowing as before, but less dramatically) x5

p mf

26 27

mp p

51

mf

simile

poco meno f

x3

mp

mf

x3

f f

55

p

mp

mp

p

mf

a little slower

x5

x7

attacca

f f

II. Full-of-Grace (Kecharitomene)
With infinite gentleness (♩ = 36-42)

And coming to her, the angel said, "Hail, Kecharitomene! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
The Gospel According to St. Luke, 1:28

60 *not rolled*

p

mp

f (after top note)

60-61: Musical score for measures 60 and 61. Measure 60 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a whole note in the left hand. Measure 61 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mp* is placed below the right hand in measure 61. A dynamic marking of *f* is placed below the left hand in measure 61, with a note indicating it is after the top note.

61

p

pp

mf

pp

61-62: Musical score for measures 61 and 62. Measure 61 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. Measure 62 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the right hand in measure 62. A dynamic marking of *mf* is placed below the left hand in measure 62. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the right hand in measure 62.

8^{va}

mp

62-63: Musical score for measures 62 and 63. Measure 62 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. Measure 63 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *mp* is placed below the left hand in measure 63. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the right hand in measure 63.

8^{va}

64

p

pp

63-64: Musical score for measures 63 and 64. Measure 63 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. Measure 64 features a piano (*p*) chord in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the right hand in measure 64.

65 8va 15ma pp sp mp

67 mf mp

68 mf p mp

8va p

71

mp

pp

72

mp

pp

8^{va}

73

p

f like rolled chords

8^{va}

f

poco piu f

8^{va}

76

f

poco più f

77

78

mf

mp cresc.

79

80

ff *fff* *fff* *fff*

81

fff *fff* *fff* *fff*

82

fff *ff* *attaca*

III. The Unburnt Bush
Furious, unrelenting (♩ = 120)

*Let us honor the Pure Theotokos! She accepted the Fire of Divinity
in her womb but was not consumed!*
The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

*both staves 8va **

ff

(loco, do not repeat)

28 *fire texture*

ff

roar

29 *B harmony/fire texture*

gradually increase density of texture

B harmony/fire texture

ff

roar

30 *B harmony/fire texture*

B harmony/fire texture

31 *reverse piano texture*

* play notes hand to hand from the boxed collections, at random but in time. Texture should be mainly single notes, with occasional diads and irregular accents.

proportional timing (gradually accelerating) (c. 10-12")

99 loco (both staves) *mf cresc.*

Red throughout

reverse piano texture

(c. 10-12")

100

reverse piano texture

(c. 10-12")

101

reverse piano texture/fire texture

(c. 10-12")

102 slowly at first, then increasing

reverse piano texture/fire texture

103 *a tempo*

reverse piano texture/fire texture

32

ff

roar

Gradually slowing *begin to drop notes from texture*

(loco)

x9

x7

Ped.

B harmony/fire texture/reverse piano texture

(c. 15-20")

107 *free and uneven, like church bells*

mf

(Ped.)

Chord and reverse piano out. B harmony in fire texture.

(small notes una corda) (c. 12-15")

108

mp

(Ped.)

pp

attacca do not clear Ped.

IV. The-One-Who-Gives-Birth-to-God (Theotokos)

We magnify the Mother of God, who beyond reason and understanding gave birth in time to the Timeless One!
The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Muted, like filtered light (♩ = 48-54)

109

pp
(retain ℄ until next marking)
una corda

repeat, keeping a fairly strict tempo (c. 30-40" per system)

110

pp sempre *p* (5-10")
very slow, asynchronous, as if suspended in time
℄

(continuing)

111

(*pp*) (6-12")

(continuing)

112

(*pp*) (10-15")
ppp *mp*

(continuing)

113

(*pp*)

114 (continuing) →

ppp mp

115 (continuing) →

p pp

116 (continuing) →

pp (6-12)

117 (continuing) →

pp mp (6-8) in time poco piu f 15th 8^{vb}

118 (continuing) →

poco piu f mf 33 attacca

V. The Woman Clothed with the Sun
Steady and assertive, timeless (♩=126)

*And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun,
and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.*
Revelation 12:1

119

f
tre corde
Ped.

Shaker
mf

124

128

132

136

140

144

148

152

Musical score for measures 152-155. The system includes a grand staff with piano and bass clefs, and a lower staff with a shaker part. The piano part features complex chords and arpeggios, while the bass part has a steady eighth-note pattern. The shaker part consists of a rhythmic pattern of vertical strokes.

156

Musical score for measures 156-159. The system includes a grand staff with piano and bass clefs, and a lower staff with a shaker part. The piano part continues with complex chords and arpeggios. The bass part maintains the eighth-note pattern. The shaker part continues with the rhythmic pattern.

160

Musical score for measures 160-163. The system includes a grand staff with piano and bass clefs, and a lower staff with a shaker part. Measure 160 shows a "loco" marking and a dynamic change to "mp". Measure 161 has a "ff" marking. A "drone and shaker continue" section is indicated with an arrow.

164

Musical score for measures 164-167. The system includes a grand staff with piano and bass clefs, and a lower staff with a shaker part. The piano part features complex chords and arpeggios. The bass part maintains the eighth-note pattern. The shaker part continues with the rhythmic pattern.

168

Musical score for measures 168-171. The system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff below. The grand staff features complex chordal textures with many beamed notes and slurs. A dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo) is present in the right hand of the grand staff. The single bass clef staff contains a continuous eighth-note accompaniment.

172

Musical score for measures 172-175. The system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff below. The grand staff continues with complex chordal textures and slurs. The single bass clef staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

176

Musical score for measures 176-179. The system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff below. The grand staff shows more intricate chordal patterns with some triplets and slurs. The single bass clef staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

180

Musical score for measures 180-183. The system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a single bass clef staff below. The grand staff features complex chordal textures with many beamed notes and slurs. The single bass clef staff continues with the eighth-note accompaniment.

183

ff cresc.

187

fff sempre

190

(shaker)

194

(long)

fff

VITA

Scott Peter Blasco (born 1978) is a composer, performer, and educator from Michigan. His music has been performed in concerts and festivals across the United States. His commissions include works for solo performers, chamber ensembles, dance, theatre, and intermedia sound-art installation. He is an active percussion, electric guitar, and live electronics performer, a board member of the Kansas City Electronic Music and Arts Alliance (KcEMA) and a founding member of the Kansas City-area electroacoustic new music ensemble The Digital Honkbox Revival. As an educator, Mr. Blasco has taught courses at Western Michigan University, Ball State University, Kansas City Kansas Community College, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and Washington State University, as well as private lessons in percussion and electric guitar.

Mr. Blasco's degrees include a Bachelor of Arts in Music Theory and Composition from Calvin College, a Master of Music in Composition from Western Michigan University, and a Master of Arts in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has recently completed all degree requirements toward the Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, from which he will graduate in 2011.