

Luke Byrne

Desert Sea

for SATB choir and percussion



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Desert Sea

Lyrics and Music by Luke Byrne.

Lyric text adapted from historical sources.

Beyond the painted hills,
Beneath a cobalt sky,
Lie scattered stones and seashells
Washed smooth by ancient tides.

Like the surface of a forsaken moon,
Printless sands and waterless shores.
A pale blue shape
On a folded, faded map,
Evaporated to white...

Softly yet it sounds,
The dormant heart, deep underground.
Standing still in time, horizons lost in silence,
To the eternal desert sea...

A vision of a new Galilee
Brought ships across the sand.
The flight of an ill-fated bluebird
Across the white wasteland.

Broken dreams dissolve into mirage beneath the sun,
On this ghost lake like shadows we float on invisible waves...

Softly yet it sounds,
The dormant heart, deep underground.
Standing still in time, horizons lost in silence,
To the eternal desert sea...

Kati thanda...

From distant lands and oceans
Come birds in a swarming scene.
Wildflow'rs in gold and indigo
Frame waters blue and green.

Rains flow over dry ground,
Flooding the land with colour and sound.
The cycle turns again,
The once-dead heart awakens:
The eternal desert sea.

Luke Byrne October 2015

Original program note from “To Be Sung on Water” concert for which *Desert Sea* was commissioned by Sydney Philharmonia Choirs:

I have always been fascinated by Lake Eyre, the "great lake" of Australia that is (mostly) completely dry. It occupies a unique place in our cultural geography and imagination, and before the discovery of Uluru it was the symbolic centre of our continent, the "dead heart". In the last few years Lake Eyre has been in flood and yielded almost hallucinatory photos, but I wanted to capture both of its characters. One day, hopefully soon, I'll actually get there.

A huge influence on this work was the award-winning photography of Peter Elfes, who I serendipitously met in the Royal Botanic Gardens at the time *Desert Sea* was premiered nearby at the Sydney Opera House. The language of explorers like Charles Sturt and writers like DH Lawrence have found their way into the text of this piece, but it was these unearthly, almost unbelievable photos that lent the music its character.

Source: <http://www.peterelfesphotography.com/sites/peterelfesphotography.com/files/Red-Edge1.jpg?1340858815>

SATB Choir & Percussion

Desert Sea

for Sydney Philharmonia Chamber Singers,
"to be sung on water"

Premiered Sydney Opera House Utzon Room, 21/11/15

Music by Luke Byrne
Lyrics by Luke Byrne,
adapted from historical texts

Expansive ♩ = 74

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Percussion

FRAME DRUM: *tacet* until bar 64.

mf (.) mm

mp rhythmic and resonant *mf* [stagger] *sim.*

p rhythmic and resonant [stagger, but always maintain the overall rhythmic drive] *mf* *sim.*

p *mf* mm

S

A

T

B

mf (.) ooh

p *mf* [stagger] *sim.* ooh

mf *sim.* dun dun dun

p *mf* ooh

S

A

T

B

mf Be - yond the paint - ed hills, Be - neath a co -

p *light* dun da dun dun da dun dun da dun dun da (ah)

p *light* dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun da dun da dun dun dun dun

p *mp* light and rhythmic *sim.* dun dun dun dun ah

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2
18

S
- balt sky, Lie scatt - ered stones and sea - shells

A
p *light*
da dun dun d da dun dun d dun dun da dun dun

T
8 *sim.* *p* *mp*
dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun da

B
p *mp* *sim.*
dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun

24

S
Washed smooth by an - cient tides. don

A
da dun dun dun da (ah) da dun dun d da dun dun d dun da da da

T
8 dun dun dun dun dun dun dun *sim.* dun dun dun dun dun dun Like the sur - face

B
dun dun dun ah don don don

B *mp* *mf* *mf* *mf*

30

S
don don don don don don don

A
da da da da da da da da da da da don

T
8 of a for - sa - ken moon, Print-less sands and wa - ter - less shores. A pale blue

B
don don don don don don don don don don don don don don da da da da da

37

S *mp* ah white...

A *mf* E - vap - o - ra - ted to white... *p* dun dun dun

T 8 shape on a fol - ded, fa - ded map, ah (ah) [falsetto]

B don don da da da da don ah (ah) [B2 ossia: omit Eb]

C

S *mp* Soft - ly yet it sounds, The dor-mant heart, deep un-der - ground.

A *pp* *mp* *p* *mf* dun dun dun dun dun dun da dun dun d da dun dun d dun ah ah

T 8 *pp* *mp* *p* dun dun dun dun dun dun *sim.*

B *pp* *mp* *p* dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun

52

S *mf* *f* *mp* Stand - ing still in time, ho - ri - zons lost in si - lence. to the e -

A *mf* *f* *mf* *p* ah Stand - ing still in time, ho - ri - zons lost in si(gh) dun dun

T 8 *mf* *f* *p* [echo] ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun ho - ri - zons lost in si(gh) si - lence.

B *mf* *f* ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun ho - ri - zons lost in si(gh)

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4
59

S *sub. mp* *p* **D**
ter - nal de - sert sea... ah

A *sub. mp* *p*
ter - nal de - sert sea... ah

T *p* *mf*
8 ter - nal de - sert dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun ah A

B *mp* *mf*
ter - nal de - sert ah A

Perc. 59 **FRAME DRUM (hands)** *p* *mf*

67

S *mp* *p*
ah da dun dun d da dun dun d

A *mp* *p*
ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun

T 8
vi - sion of a new Ga-li-lee Brought ships a - cross the sand.

B
vi - sion of a new Ga-li-lee Brought ships a - cross the sand.

Perc. 67 [this or similar simple groove - not too much of a backbeat!] [4] [8]

74

S *mf* *mp* *p*
dun ah da dun dun d da dun

A *mf* *mp* *p*
dun ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun

T 8
The flight of an ill-fa-ted blue - bird A - cross the white waste - land.

B
The flight of an ill-fa-ted blue - bird A - cross the white waste - land.

Perc. 74 [12] optional fill pattern [16]

E

p *disoriented*

S Bro - ken dreams dis - solve in - to mi - rage be - neath the sun

A *p*
don don don _____ don _____ don don don _____

T *p*
8 don don don don _____ don don don don _____ don don don don _____ *mp* On this ghost

B *p*
don don _____ don don don _____ don don _____ *mp* oh _____

Perc. 82 [STICKS: high rim sound - side-drum-like]
p *ghostly*

90

S wave(s) _____ waves... _____

A *mp*
on in - vi - si - ble waves... _____ *p* dun dun dun

T 8 lake like sha - dows we float ah _____ waves... _____

B ah _____ ah _____ waves... [B2 ossia: omit Eb]

Perc. 90 [4]

F

mp

S Soft - ly yet it sounds, The dor-mant heart, deep un-der - ground.

A *pp* *mp* *p* *mf*
dun dun dun dun dun dun dun da dun dun d da dun dun d dun ah _____ ah

T *pp* *mp* *p*
8 dun dun dun dun dun dun *sim.*

B *pp* *mp* *p*
dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun

Perc. 98 [MALLET: deep heart beats]
p [4]

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6
105

S *mf* Stand - ing still in time, ho - ri - zons *f* lost in si - lence. *mp* to the e -

A *mf* ah Stand - ing still in time, ho - ri - zons *f* lost in si(gh) *mf* dun *p* dun

T *mf* ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun ho - ri - zons *f* lost in si(gh) *p* [echo] si - lence.

B *mf* ah dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun ho - ri - zons *f* lost in si(gh)

Perc. 105 [4]

112

S *p* ter - nal de - sert ooh *pp* lontano, sotto voce *rit.* ooh

A *p* ter - nal de - sert ooh *pp* lontano, sotto voce ooh

T *p* ter - nal de - sert ooh *pp* lontano, sotto voce ooh

B *p* ter - nal de - sert ooh *pp* lontano, sotto voce ooh

[brush surface of drum in slow sweeping circles to simulate wind - gradually introduce gentle swells and lulls]

Perc. 112 *pp*

G Senza misura 1 2 3

FIRST SOP GROUP [whistled or sung] **PINK-EARED DUCKS** [continue] **SECOND SOP GROUP** **WHIP-BIRDS** [overall volume and intensity not too loud - still slightly sparse]

WATER-BIRD WHISTLES (several) - may be played by any section member up till bar 140.

121 *sim.*

Perc.

4 5 6 7 8 **H** Steady at first ♩ = 108

S

A *pp* ooh* ooh ____ [Alt + Ten gradually transition from blur to this figure:] *p* da ____ dun da ____ da da ____ dun da ____ da

T *pp* ooh* ooh ____ [sing this pitch independently for variable lengths to create subtly undulating surface] *p* da ____ dun da ____ da da ____ dun da ____ da

B [whistles continue till 140] *p* [together] ooh - ah [gradual shift] ka - ti than - da [stagger]

127 [not metrically in time - resume wind sound when low resonance has sounded]

Perc. [pick up one mallet] *mp* deep, like a resonant heartbeat

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8 *tutti cresc. e accel. poco a poco* *mp* [a few Sops start on this line, gradually all Sops leave birdcalls and sing this line]

134

S *ooh* *ooh*

A *sim.*

T *sim.*

B ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da ka - ti - than - da ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da

Perc. 134 [pick up second mallet]

$\text{♩} = 72$ ($\text{♩} = 144$), *sempre accel.*

140 *mf tutti* [stagger] *f*

S ah ah (ah)

A *mf* *f*

T *mf* *f*

B *mf* *f*

B ka - ti than - da ka - ti - than - da ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da

Perc. 140 [increasing in frequency and violence]

ROLLING THUNDER - not metrically in time

I Fast $\text{♩} = 86$

S *ff*

A *ff*
ah ah

T *ff*
ah ah

B *ff*
ka - ti than - da

Perc. *ff* **TIMPANI MALLETS**

S *f*
From dis - tant lands and o - ceans Come birds in a swarm - ing

A *f*
From dis - tant lands and o - ceans Come birds in a swarm - ing

T *f*
From dis - tant lands and o - ceans Come birds in a swarm - ing

B *f*
From dis - tant lands and o - ceans Come birds in a swarm - ing

Perc. *mf*

S *f* *mf*
scene. Wild - flow'rs in gold and in - di - go Frame

A *f* *mf*
scene. Wild - flow'rs in gold and in - di - go Frame

T *f* *mf*
scene. Wild - flow'rs in gold and in - di - go Frame

B *f* *mf*
scene. Wild - flow'rs in gold and in - di - go Frame

Perc. *f* *mf*

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10
165

S wa - ters blue _____ and green.

A wa - ters blue _____ and green. da dun dun__ dun dun__ dun da dun da

T wa - ters blue _____ and green.

B wa - ters blue _____ and green.

Perc. 165

J *mf*

S Rains flow o - ver__ dry ground,

A *mp* da da dn dun__ da da da da da dn dun__ da da da *mf* da da dn dun__ d da da dn dun d da dn da dn

T *mp* da da dn dun__ da da da da da dn dun__ da da da *mf* da dun dun__ dun dun__ dun da dun da

B *mp* ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da *mf* ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da

Perc. 170 [smaller notes ghosted, so it sounds like this heartbeat pattern] [4]

mp deep

174

S Flood - ing__ the land__ with co - lour and sound.

A *f* da da dn dun__ da da da da da dn dun__ da da da dun__ ah

T *f* da da dn dun__ da da da da da dn dun__ da da da dun__ ah

B *f* ka - ti than - da ka - ti than - da ah

Perc. 174

f

178 *f* *ff*

S The cy - cle turns a - gain, The once - dead heart a - wa - kens: _____

A — cy - cle turns a - gain, The once - dead heart a - wa - kens: _____

T — cy - cle turns a - gain, The once - dead heart a - wa - kens: _____

B — cy - cle turns a - gain, The once - dead heart a - wa - kens: _____

Perc. *mp* *f*

183 *sub. mp* *f*

S — The e - ter - - - - - nal de - sert _____

A — The e - ter - - - - - nal de - sert _____

T — The e - ter - - - - - nal de - sert _____

B — The e - ter - - - - - nal de - sert _____

Perc. *p*

188

S — sea. _____

A — sea. _____

T — sea. _____

B — sea. _____

Perc. *f* *ff*