

# **The Age of Assassins**

**for tenor, horn and piano**

**Jeff Myers**

**(2008)**

# The Age of Assassins

for tenor, horn and piano

**duration:** 18 minutes

**performance note:** requires inside piano playing.

Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) wrote poetry for only a few years of his youth, but he left a legacy of poetry which had a lasting reverberance for poets and artists which followed him. The title of my song cycle comes from the last line of his *Matinée d'Ivresse*, "Voici le temps des ASSASSINS." Rimbaud makes a subtle etymological reference to the Arabic *hashshashin*, or "hash-eaters," ancient Arab assassins which were rumored to be under the influence of hashish. It is a fact that Rimbaud himself was under the influence of hashish and probably alcohol or absinthe in order to become a seer. In his own words, "The poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, prodigious, and rational *disordering of all the senses...*" Some of the poems in his brief, but impressive output do indeed smell of hashish and appear to be under the influence of this "disordering of the senses."

I chose to set poems and fragments of poems which resonated with my own personal experiences, the details of which shall remain cryptic to say the least. The format Rimbaud's poetry is quite varied—there are Alexandrines, metered poems disguised as free-verse, prose poems, rhymed couplets etc. Some poems, such as "Veillées III" and "Matinée d'Ivresse" are more narrative, which lent a more dramatic, operatic setting. The first song, "Chanson de la plus haute tour" has a refrain and rhythms, so I made it into more of a "number." The transcendent tone of "L'Éternité" provided me with the opportunity to explore an introspective kind of setting, this time more about the inner meaning of the text than narrative. The last song is a combination of two poems, "Sensation" and "Mémoire V." These Alexandrine poems are somewhat narrative, but also descriptive of a state. These poems express an attitude towards longing and love—I believe— through metaphors found in nature. According to my interpretation, in "Sensation" the open countryside is a metaphor for the attainment of transcendent love and happiness, while in "Mémoire V" the poet is caught between two loves (flowers) and cannot achieve happiness because he cannot grasp either while he is stuck on his immobile boat in the "mournful" water. Thus we see both the good and bad side of desire.

- Jeff Myers

## **Complete Texts by Arthur Rimbaud**

with chosen texts in bold

### **Chanson de la plus haute tour**

[taken from "Une Saison en Enfer"]

Qu'il vienne, qu'il vienne,  
Le temps dont on s'éprenne

**J'ai tant fait patience  
Qu'a jamais j'oublie ;  
Craintes et souffrances  
Aux cieux sont parties.  
Et la soif malsaine  
Obscurcit mes veines**

Qu'il vienne, qu'il vienne,  
Le temps dont on séprenne

**Telle la prairie  
À l'oubli livrée,  
Grandie, et fleurie  
D'encens et d'ivraies  
Au bourdon farouche  
Des sales mouches.**

Qu'il vienne, qu'il vienne,  
Le temps dont on s'éprenne

### **A Song from the highest Tower**

Let it come, let it come,  
The season we can love

**I have waited so long  
That at length I forget;  
And leave unto heaven  
My fear and regret.  
A sick thirst  
Darkens my veins.**

Let it come, let it come,  
The season we can love

**So the green field  
To oblivion falls,  
Overgrown, flowering,  
With incense and weeds  
And the cruel noise  
Of dirty flies.**

Let it come, let it come,  
The season we can love

## **Veillées**

### **III**

**Les lampes et les tapis de la veillée font le bruit des vagues, la nuit, le long de la coque et autour du steerage. La mer de la veillée, telle que les seins d'Amélie. Les tapisseries, jusqu'à mi-hauteur, des taillis de dentelle teinte d'émeraude, où se jettent les tourterelles de la veillée.**

.....

**La plaque du foyer noir, de réels soleils des grèves : ah ! puits des magies ; seule vue d'aurore, cette fois.**

## **Vigils**

### **III**

**The lamps and the rugs of the vigil make the noise of waves in the night, along the hull and around the steerage. The sea of the vigil, like Emily's breasts. The hangings, halfway up, undergrowth of emerald tinted lace, where dart the vigil doves.**

.....

**The plaque of the black hearth, real suns of seashores; ah! magic wells; only sight of dawn, this time.**

## **L'Éternité**

[taken from "Une Saison en Enfer"]

**Elle est retrouvée.**

Quoi ? - **L'Éternité.**

C'est la mer mêlée

Au soleil.

**Mon âme éternelle,**

**Observe ton voeu**

**Malgré la nuit seule**

**Et le jour en feu.**

Donc tu te dégages

Des humains suffrages

Des communs élans

**Et voles selon...**

- Jamais d'espérance

Pas d'*orietur*.

Science et patience,

Le supplice est sûr.

Plus de lendemain,

Braises de satin,

Votre ardeur

Est le devoir.

Elle est retrouvée !

- Quoi ? - L'Éternité. C'est la mer mêlée

Au soleil.

## **Eternity**

**It is recovered.**

What? - **Eternity.**

In the whirling light

Of the sun in the sea.

**O my eternal soul,**

**Hold fast to desire**

**In spite of the night**

**And the day on fire.**

You must set yourself free

From the striving of Man

And the applause of the World

**And fly, it all depends...**

- No hope forever

No *orietur*.

Science and patience,

The torment is sure.

The fire within you,

Soft silken embers,

Is our whole duty

But no one remembers.

It is recovered.

What? Eternity.

In the whirling light

Of the sun in the sea.

## Matinée d'ivresse

**O mon Bien ! O mon Beau! Fanfare atroce où je ne trébuchet point!** Chevalet féérique! Hourra pour l'oeuvre inouïe et pour le corps merveilleux, pour la première fois! Cela commença sous les rires des enfants, cela finira par eux. **Ce poison va rester dans toutes nos veines** même quand, la fanfare tournant, **nous serons rendus à l'ancienne inharmonie.** O maintenant, nous si digne de ces tortures! rassemblons fervemment cette promesse surhumaine faite à notre corps et à notre âme créés: cette promesse, cette démente! L'élégance, la science, la violence! On nous a promis d'enterrer dans l'ombre l'arbre du bien et du mal, de déporter les honnêtetés tyranniques, afin que nous amenions notre très pur amour. Cela commença par quelques dégoûts et cela finit, - ne pouvant nous saisir sur-le-champ de cette éternité, - cela finit par une débandade de parfums.

Rire des enfants, discrétion des esclaves, austérité des vierges, horreur des figures et des objets d'ici, sacrés soyez-vous par le souvenir de cette veille. Cela commençait par toute la rusterie, voici que cela finit par des anges de flamme et de glace.

Petite veille d'ivresse, sainte! quand ce ne serait que pour le masque dont tu as gratifié. Nous t'affirmons, méthode! Nous n'oublions pas que tu as glorifié hier chacun de nos âges. **Nous avons foi au poison. Nous savons donner notre vie tout entière tous les jours.**

Voici le temps des ASSASSINS.

## Morning of Drunkenness

**O my Good! O my Beautiful! Appalling fanfare where I do not falter!** Rack of enchantments! Hurrah for the wonderful work and for the marvelous body, for the first time! It began in the midst of children's laughter, with their laughter will it end. **This poison will remain in all our veins** even when, the fanfare turning, **we shall be given back to the old disharmony.** O now may we, so worthy of these tortures! fervently take up the superhuman promise made to our created body and soul: that promise, that madness! Elegance, science, violence! They promised to bury in darkness the tree of good and evil, to deport tyrannic respectability so that we might bring hither our very pure love. It began with a certain disgust and it ends, - unable to grasp this eternity, - it ends in a riot of perfumes.

Laughter of children, discretion of slaves, austerity of virgins, loathing of faces and objects here, holy be all of you in memory of this vigil. It began with every sort of boorishness, behold it ends with angels of flame and ice.

Little drunken vigil, holy! if only because of the mask you have bestowed on us. We pronounce you, method! We shall not forget that yesterday you glorified each one of our ages. **We have faith in the poison. We know how to give our whole life every day.**

Now is the time of the ASSASSINS.

## **Sensation**

**Par les soirs bleus d'été, j'irai dans les sentiers,  
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue :  
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds.  
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue.**

**Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien :  
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme,  
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,  
Par la nature, heureux comme avec une femme.**

## **Sensation**

**On the blue summer evenings, I shall go down the paths,  
Getting pricked by the corn, crushing the short grass:  
In a dream I shall feel its coolness on my feet.  
I shall let the wind bathe my bare head.**

**I shall not speak, I shall think about nothing:  
But endless love will mount in my soul;  
And I shall travel far, very far, like a gipsy,  
Through the countryside - as happy as if I were with a woman**

## **Mémoire**

**Jouet de cet oeil d'eau morne, je n'y puis prendre,  
ô canot immobile! oh! bras trop courts! ni l'une  
ni l'autre fleur; ni la jaune qui m'importune,  
là; ni la bleue, amie à l'eau couleur de cendre.**

Ah ! la poudre des saules qu'une aile secoue!  
Les roses des roseaux dès longtemps dévorées!  
Mon canot toujours fixe; et sa chaîne tirée  
au fond de cet oeil d'eau sans bords, - à quelle boue?

## **Memory**

**Toy of this sad eye of water, I cannot pluck,  
o! motionless boat! o! arms too short! neither this  
nor the other flower: neither the yellow one which bothers me,  
there; nor the friendly blue one in the ash-colored water.**

Ah! dust of the willows shaken by a wing!  
The roses of the reeds devoured long ago!  
My boat still stationary; and its chain caught  
in the bottom of this rimless eye of water,—in what mud?

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for Laura Klock

(Transposed Score)

# The Age of Assassins

Texts by Artur Rimbaud

## I. Chanson de la plus haute tour

Jeff Myers

(2008)

**Appassionato, con fuoco**

♩ = ca.132

Tenor

Horn in F (written)

Piano

*f tenuto sempre*

*mf*

*mp*

*Pedal per chord as desired.*

10

T.

Hn.

Pno.

*mf*

*mp*

*mf*

*mp*

— pa - tien - ce

Qu'à jam - ais j'ou -

19

T.

Hn.

Pno.

*f espress.*

*mp*

*p*

*più mf*

*p*

blie. —

Crain - tes et souf - fran - ces

aux

8<sup>vb</sup>

25

T. *poco* *mf*

Hn. *p* *poco*

Pno. *mp*

cioux sont par - ties. Et la soif mal - sai - ne Ob - scur - cit mes

(8)-----]

33 *f* (*appassionato*)

T. *f* *pp* *mf*

Hn. *f* *pp* *mf*

Pno. *mf* *f*

vei - nes. Qu'il vien - ne, qu'il vien - ne, Le temps dont on s'ép - pren - ne. Qu'il vien - ne, qu'il

40

T. vien - ne, Le temps dont on s'ép - pren - ne.

Hn.

Pno. *mf*

45 *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp*

T. *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp*

Tel - le la prair - ie A l'oub - li liv - rée, Gran - die, et fleu - rie d'en - cens et d'iv - rai

Hn. *p* *mf* *pp* *p*

Pno. *p* *pp* *mp*

8<sup>vb</sup> Ped.

52 *p* *mf* *f*

T. *p* *mf* *f*

- es, Au bour - don far - ou - che Des sa - les mou - ches.

Hn. *f* *risoluto*

Pno. *mf* *f*

58 *mf* *mp*

Hn. *mf*

Pno. *mp*

63 rit. . . . . \*) (7th harmonic) = 100

Hn.

Pno.

*niente*

*f* *p* *fz*

## II. Veillées (III)

67 = 120 \*) valves: 2 T23 2 T23 1 0

Hn.

Pno.

*p* *mp* *p*

*f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp*

*\*\**

*durations may be slightly inexact (quasi rubato)*

76 *intoxicated: rubato ad lib.* *p*

T.

Hn.

Pno.

*p* *f* *ppp* *f*

Les lam - pes et les ta - pis de la veil - lée,

\*) Do not adjust intonation; all valve fingerings in Veillées should be executed without adjustment of intonation to preserve the natural overtone tunings.  
 \*\*) Depress the low note and lightly touch the string on the node to produce the harmonic (in this case it is the flat 7th); pre-mark the place on the string which produces this harmonic, using chalk or tape. The harmonic in the bass staff should beat with the following treble note. A better sound is obtained if the finger is removed from the string after the note is struck.



rit. . . . . ♩ = 112

99 *mf*

T. *mf*

Hn. *p* *f*

Pno. (random, messy tremolo) *ff* *mf*

Les ta - pis - se - ries, jus - qu' à mi - hau - teur, des tail - lis de den -

Ped. 3 3

rit. . . . . ♩ = 100

103 *p* *mf*

T. *p* *mf*

Hn. *mp* *f* *mp*

Pno. *mp* *ff* *mf*

tel - le tein - te d' é - me - rau - de où se jettent les tour - te - rel - les de la veil - lée.

Ped. 3 5 3

106 ♩ = 120

rit. . . . . a tempo

T. *ppp*

Hn. *f* *ppp*

Pno. *f legato* *ppp* *as before*

Ped. 3 3 3 3 3 3

overtone rips (approximate rhythm)

109 T23 T12 T1 T2

Hn. *mf*

Pno.

Meno mosso accel. rit. molto rit.

111 0 3 T 2 T2 1 T1 12 T12 12 T12

Hn. *ff* *mf* *mp* *p*

Pno. *ff* *f* *8<sup>vb</sup>...*

117 ♩ = 112 *mf*

T. La pla-que de foy - er noir

Hn. T2 *mf* > *p* norm. fingering *mf*

Pno. *mf* *f* *p* *f*

♩ = 112  
rit. . . . . a tempo

*ff*

123

T. *f*

de ré - els sol - eil des grè - ves: ah! \_\_\_\_\_ puits des ma -

Hn. *p* *f*

Pno. *mf* *ff* *f*

with Ped.

128

T. *p*

gies; seu - le vue d'au - ro - re. (T12)

Hn. *mf*

Pno. *mf* *f*

132

T. *p*

cet - te fois.

Hn. (T12)

Pno. *mf* *f*