

Notes from the composer: What Are We Doing to Our World?

“What Are We Doing to Our World?” is a moving mixture of music: Gospel, Latin, Jazz and Choral interwoven with stirring passages from writers such as John Muir, Robert Farrar Capon, Chief Seattle, Madeline L’Engle and Mark Twain that inspire sustainable environmental awareness and behavioral change.

“What Are We Doing To Our World?” began with a song inspired many years ago when I heard Jacques Cousteau say that far out to sea, he saw islands of debris. That sounded like a lyric to me. And it became one:

Rivers running black, waters without life
Pushing their way to the ocean
Oily iridescence shimmers on the beach
And far out to sea, floating islands of debris
Oh, what are we doing to our world?

Will the songbirds fly?
Will the butterflies light upon the flow'rs in the fields of tomorrow?
Will the beasts of the jungles live only in books?
Oh, what are we doing to our world?
What are we doing to our world?

Hurricanes and floods ...

The piece began through several writing opportunities: an Earth Day piece commissioned by St. Mark’s Cathedral in Minneapolis, another at St. Bartholomew’s Church in Manhattan.

Then, as I finalized the work, I produced two workshops performances. The first was at the Players Club, and most recently, produced by Resurrection Church at the Church of the Good Shepherd in New York. It is interesting to me that so many churches are now feeling that they should speak up about Climate Change.

The workshop performances have aroused much enthusiasm, particularly in this time, when so much of what is described in the lyrics to the title song has already occurred. At Duke University, Dean Vincent of the Nicholas School of Environment and Dean Powery of the University Chapel are planning to host a co-production of the show next season at the University Chapel. It will be open to the community as well as the college.

“What Are We Doing To Our World?” would be a powerful opening for conferences on climate change and could easily be a community production. I am thrilled that Chelsea Opera is producing it here in New York this July.