

DAVID SHAPIRO
SUMPTUOUS
PLANET



THE CROSSING DONALD NALLY

David Shapiro

Sumptuous Planet: A Secular Mass (2021)

1	<i>Introit</i> – Unsung	3:25
2	<i>Mercy</i> – If There Is Mercy	2:51
3	<i>Glory</i> – Magnificent Structure	4:09
4	<i>Earth</i> – Sumptuous Planet	4:56
5	<i>The Adoration</i> – Staggering, Elegant, Beautiful Thing	3:49
6	<i>Thankfulness</i>	3:56
7	<i>Taking Away the Sins of the World</i> – Sin	7:13
8	<i>Spirit</i> – Mystic Jelly	5:36
9	<i>Belief</i> – The Truth	5:58
10	<i>All Things Visible and Invisible</i> – Tiny Things	5:17
11	<i>Substance</i> – Giant Megalopolis	4:48
12	<i>Death</i> – The Lucky Ones	9:16
13	<i>Suffering</i>	4:20
14	<i>Resurrection</i> – One Life	2:43
15	<i>Holiness</i> – One God Further	2:31
16	<i>Osanna</i> – And We Dance	2:55

Total Time: 73:46

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Ryan Fleming and John Walthausen, *guest rehearsal accompanists*

Paul Vazquez, *sound designer*

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This album is made possible through the generous support of the Neubauer Family Foundation.
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SUMPTUOUS PLANET

A Secular Mass

music by David Shapiro
words by Richard Dawkins, Richard Feynman,
and Antonie van Leeuwenhoek

Commissioned by The Crossing

A NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

Sumptuous Planet is a statement and celebration of belief in a scientific view of how life and the universe work. It is constructed along the lines of a Christian mass. The chosen texts are mostly by Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist famous—in part—for his defense of atheism. Composing a Mass on his words was an idea I found to be pleasingly paradoxical.

Sumptuous Planet starts with a setting of physicist Richard Feynman's lament that, "The value of science remains unsung by singers. This is not yet a scientific age." From there, the piece proceeds to glorify an unvarnished, open-eyed way of looking at the world as it is, without dressing it up with myths or miracle stories.

Each movement takes a word or an idea from the Christian Mass, and sets a text by Dawkins that touches on that same concept from a very different perspective. Gloria becomes: Nature is a magnificent structure; Credo: I believe in an orderly universe indifferent to human preoccupations; Sanctus: We are all atheists about most gods.

As in Bach's Mass in B minor, large sections are broken up into smaller movements which set just a passage or two of the larger text. The six "Gloria" movements focus on a sense of amazement at the structure of the universe and our existence in it. The "Credo", again broken into six sections, highlights both the molecular basis of life and the inescapability of suffering and death. The Mass ends with a quick movement on the subject of gods, and a jubilant "Osanna".

The music takes inspiration from a wide variety of sources, such as Scottish jigs and medieval and renaissance polyphony, exploring several divergent techniques and textures of choral writing. My aim was that every movement would be a complete, distinct world unto itself, which would still fit into the mass as a whole.

— David Shapiro

davidshapirocomposer.com

□ SONG TEXTS

1. *Introit* — *Unsung*

“Is no one inspired by our present picture of the universe? This value of science remains unsung by singers. ... This is not yet a scientific age.”

– Richard Feynman, from his talk “The Value of Science,” provided courtesy of Ralph Leighton.

2. *Mercy* — *If There Is Mercy*

“[If] there is mercy in nature, it is accidental. Nature is neither kind nor cruel but indifferent.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *A Devil's Chaplain* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), used by kind permission of the author.

3. *Glory* — *Magnificent Structure*

“Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility.”

Gloria repleta est natura

*Magnifica campages est natura. Possumus
intelligere autem, licet imperfecte. Et haec quidem
oportet replere sensu humilitatis hominem
cogitantem sua mente.*

– Richard Dawkins, from *The God Delusion* (Mariner Books, 2008), used by kind permission of the author. Latin translation by Theodore Cheek.

4. *Earth* — *Sumptuous Planet*

“After sleeping through a hundred million centuries we have finally opened our eyes on a sumptuous planet, sparkling with color, bountiful with life. Within decades we must close our eyes again.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *Unweaving Rainbows: science, delusion, and the appetite for wonder* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), used by kind permission of the author.

5. *The Adoration* — Staggering, Elegant, Beautiful Thing

“Life started from nothing – that is such a staggering, elegant, beautiful thing.”

Vita apparuit ex nihilo - tam mirabilis est et placita et pulcherrima

– Richard Dawkins, quoted in *The Telegraph* 2012-02-24, used by kind permission of the author. Latin translation by Theodore Cheek.

6. *Thankfulness*

“Be thankful that you have a life, and forsake your vain and presumptuous desire for a second one.”

– Richard Dawkins, Quoted in *Salon* 2005-04-30, used by kind permission of the author.

7. *Taking away the sins of the world* — Sin

“Let us try to teach generosity ... because we are born selfish ... We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth ... deliberately cultivating and nurturing ... altruism - something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. ... we have the power to turn against our own creators. We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators. ... Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because we may then at least have a chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to do.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1976), used by kind permission of the author.

8. *Spirit* — Mystic Jelly

“There is no spirit-driven life force, no throbbing, heaving, pulsating, protoplasmic, mystic jelly.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *River Out of Eden* (Basic Books, 1995), used by kind permission of the author.

9. *Belief* — The Truth

“I believe ... an orderly universe, one indifferent to human preoccupations, in which everything has an explanation even if we still have a long way to go before we find it, ... a ... beautiful, ... wonderful place.”

“My eyes are ... wide open to the extraordinary fact of existence. Not just human existence, but the existence of life and how ... natural selection, has managed to take the very simple facts of physics and chemistry and build them up to make redwood trees and humans.”

“The truth is more magical - in the best and most exciting sense of the word - than any myth or ... mystery or miracle.”

– Richard Dawkins from *Unweaving the rainbow: science, delusion and the appetite for wonder* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), quoted in *The Guardian*, 2013-09-15, and from *The Magic of Reality* (Bantam Press, 2011), used by kind permission of the author.

10. *All things, visible and invisible* — Incredibly Tiny Things

“The whole world is made of incredibly tiny things, much too small to be visible to the naked eye. Ponds and lakes, soil and dust, even our body, teem with tiny living creatures, too small to see, yet ... complicated and ... beautiful.”

“I perceived in the water more of those Animals ... And I imagine, that ten hundred thousand of these little Creatures do not equal a grain of sand. For, the circumference of one of these little Animals in water ... is not so big as the hair in a Cheesemite.”

Totus mundus factus est ex infinite parvis materniis quas nemo videre potest. Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

– Richard Dawkins from *The Magic of Reality* (Bantam Press, 2011), used by kind permission of the author. Latin translation by Theodore Cheek. Additional text by Antoine van Leeuwenhoek, 1632-1723, known as the “Father of Microbiology”

11. *Substance* — Giant Megalopolis

“The Krebs cycle, the 9-toothed cogwheel that is largely responsible for making energy available to us, turns over at up to 100 revolutions per second, duplicated thousands of times in every cell. Chemical cogwheels of this particular marque are housed inside mitochondria, tiny bodies that reproduce independently inside our cells like bacteria ... Mitochondria ... are directly descended from ancestral bacteria who, a billion years ago, gave up their freedom. You are a giant megalopolis of bacteria.”

Et homo factus est

– Richard Dawkins, from *Unweaving Rainbows: science, delusion, and the appetite for wonder* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), used by kind permission of the author.

12. *Death* — The Lucky Ones

“We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. ... It is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here. We privileged few, who won the lottery of birth against all odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority have never stirred?”

– Richard Dawkins, from *Unweaving Rainbows: science, delusion, and the appetite for wonder* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), used by kind permission of the author.

13. *Suffering*

“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. ... thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. [...] In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, others will get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *River Out of Eden* (Basic Books, 1995), used by kind permission of the author.

14. *Resurrection* — One Life

“Don’t kid yourself that you’re going to live again after you’re dead; you’re not. Make the most of the one life you’ve got. Live it to the full.”

– Richard Dawkins, from an Interview with *BeliefNet* 2005-11, used by kind permission of the author.

15. *Holiness* — One God Further

“We are all atheists about most of the gods that societies have ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.”

Baal, Isis, Ra, Mithras, Zeus, Balder, Ing, Ishtar, Ashur, Bes, Geb, Aphrodite, An, Inti, Sangti, Nuwa, Mot, Hera, El, Enki, Tengri, Bor, Zhinu, Utu, Jamus, Cronus, Horus, Dionysus, Heka, Freya, Lir, Bacchus, Chaac, Venus, Kon, Xolotl, Thor, Bastet.

– Richard Dawkins, from a TedTalk, 2002, used by kind permission of the author.

16. *Osanna* — And We Dance

“DNA neither cares nor knows. And we dance to its music.”

– Richard Dawkins, from *River Out of Eden* (Basic Books, 1995), used by kind permission of the author.

DAVID SHAPIRO



DONALD NALLY



Sumptuous Planet was recorded January 2-6, 2023 at St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

It premiered July 8, 2022 at The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill during The Month of Moderns, The Crossing's annual summer festival of new music.

Movement 4 was composed for The Crossing's *Jeff Quartets*, in memory of Jeffrey Dinsmore, and was premiered July 8, 2016.

Recording Producers: Paul Vazquez, Donald Nally, & Kevin Vondrak

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Assistant Recording Engineers: Codi Yhap

Editing, Mixing, & Mastering: Paul Vazquez

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The Crossing's recordings are supported by a generous gift of Carol Westfall, longtime friend and benefactor.

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