Valley of Dry Bones
Sang Mi Ahn
Valley of Dry Bones
for Orchestra (2013)

Program notes

*Valley of Dry Bones* is inspired by the biblical passage from Ezekiel 37:1-12. In the passage, Ezekiel is asked by God to command a valley of dry bones to come alive. I wanted to deliver this dynamic story through a vast soundscape. Even though my music is a reflection of the biblical passage, I did not want to create a direct musical translation of the story. Instead, I decided to use several keywords from the passage ("came together," “breathe into,” “came to life,” “stood up”) to form snapshots of the story, recreating two major musical events through my composition.

The first event describes the accumulation of discrete elements, evoking the joining and layering of the flesh, muscles, and skin as they gradually cover the bones. I hope the audience can enjoy the various layers as they emerge, similar to the way visitors appreciate disparate objects displayed in difference spaces and on different floors within a museum. I strived to create an environment in which the audience can explore freely on their own. Even though Ezekiel saw all the elements of the body coming together at his command, there was no still breath in them at first. The absence of a single element made the revival of the dry bones incomplete, reminding us of how our passionate endeavors turn meaningless when we fail to recognize what is essential to our purpose. In the music, this futile effort is depicted through a persistent ascent that falls and exhausts itself in an instant.

The second event describes the breath/wind, a vital element which was to eventually bring life to the dry bones. This new breath results in the resurrection, symbolic of a second life that is embodied in the now live bones. I wanted to explore different characteristics of wind because a second life is not experienced in any single way. As the breath from the four winds filled the lungs of the dead, they came alive and stood up as a vast army. I did not imagine such an awakening to be a clean process; the live army would still be covered with dirt, dust, and ashes. The residue on the revived bodies is evidence that they had once died. Towards the end of the piece, this new life is expressed as a chorale and the remnants on the body as soft noise. As time passes, the peripheral sounds surrounding the chorale gradually vanish as the dust is shed from the resurrected bodies. Some of these sounds evaporate while others are absorbed into the chorale, the final and only remaining presence.

The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then he asked me, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?” “O Sovereign LORD,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.” Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’” So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’” So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.
Instrumentation

Piccolo
2 Flutes
3 Oboes
2 Clarinets in B-flat
Bass Clarinet
2 Bassoons
Contrabassoon

4 Horns in F
3 Trumpets in C
2 Trombones
Bass Trombone
Tuba

Percussion (3 Players)

Player 1:
  Large Wood Block
  Large Tube Shaker
  Bamboo Wind Chimes
  Claves
  3 Suspended Cymbals (Large, Medium, Small)
  Hi-Hat
  Sizzle Cymbal
  4 Tom-toms (high to low)
  Bongos (2)
  Glockenspiel
  Tubular Bells (shared with player 3)

Player 2:
  Large Tam-tam (bass bow required for bowing)
  Medium Suspended Cymbal
  Mark Tree
  Slapstick
  Vibraslap
  Sandpaper Blocks
  5 Temple Blocks
  Xylophone
  Vibraphone
  Snare Drum

Player 3:
  Medium Wood Block
  Maracas (2)
  Guiro
  Bass Drum
  Marimba
  Crotales (C4-C6; bass bow required for bowing)
  Small Triangle
  Tubular Bells (shared with player 1)

Celesta
Harp

Strings

Score in C. (Instruments that sound at the octave or double octave are notated at their written pitch.)

Duration: ca. 13 minutes
Performance Notes

1) flt. = flutter-tonguing

c. l. b. = col legno battuto

s. p. = sul ponticello

s. t. = sul tasto

norm. = normal

n = niente

\[ \begin{align*}
\frac{\uparrow}{4} & = \text{raised by a } \frac{1}{4}\text{-tone} \\
\frac{\downarrow}{4} & = \text{lowered by a } \frac{1}{4}\text{-tone} \\
\uparrow & = \text{highest note possible}
\end{align*} \]

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\(\uparrow\)} & = \text{accel.} \\
\text{\(\downarrow\)} & = \text{rit.}
\end{align*} \]

(When there is a beamed group of notes with stems alone, it indicates an unspecified number of repetitions of the initial pitch within the duration indicated.)

Stem alone without notehead indicates an unspecified pitch.

2) All grace notes should be placed right before the beat, unless otherwise indicated, as in the following examples:

(a)

(b)
3) *glissandi* occupy the entire duration of the notes to which they are attached; if a *portamento* (port.) is desired, it is specifically indicated.

4) Materials enclosed within repeat signs are to be repeated in the order they appear.

Segments to be repeated in random order are placed within a box (except at m. 189). Each segment is separated from the others by either a rest or a breath mark.

The straight line following the repeated gestures indicates that the events within either the repeat signs or a box are to be continued until the line stops.
Valley of Dry Bones

(2013)

Dedicated to Song Kum Ahn

Sang Mi Ahn

C Score


\[ \text{\( \frac{4}{4} \text{ \( \Rightarrow \) } 56 \), Mysterious} \]

Piccolo

Flute 1, 2

Oboe 1, 2

Oboe 3

Clarinet 1, 2

Bass Clarinet

Bassoon 1, 2

Contra Bassoon

Horn 1, 3

Horn 2, 4

Trumpet 1, 2

Trumpet 3

Trombone 1, 2

Bass Trombone

Tuba

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Percussion 3

Celesta

Harp

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

\[ q = 56, \text{ Mysterious} \]

\[ \text{Cello: Bow slowly on either C or G string behind the bridge, changing bows freely.} \]

\[ \text{Double Bass: Bow slowly on either C-E or A string behind the bridge, changing bows freely.} \]

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Knock on the back of the instrument to create percussive sounds. The rhythm does not have to be coordinated among the players.
poco a poco accel.
* The figurations do not have to be coordinated between players.
Picc. Fl. 1, 2
Ob. 1, 2
Ob. 3
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
B. Cl.
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
c. Bn.
Hn. 1, 3
Hn. 2, 4
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Vc.
D.B.

accel. \( \frac{2}{4} \) = ca. 76

Fl. 1, 2
Ob. 1, 2
Ob. 3
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
B. Cl.
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
c. Bn.
Hn. 1, 3
Hn. 2, 4
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Vc.
D.B.

accel. \( \frac{2}{4} \) = ca. 76

Fl. 1, 2
Ob. 1, 2
Ob. 3
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
B. Cl.
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
c. Bn.
Hn. 1, 3
Hn. 2, 4
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Vc.
D.B.

accel. \( \frac{2}{4} \) = ca. 76
*Position the trill for as long as you can hold your breath and immediately switch to the grace note figurations.*
misurato (q = 60)

Strings: repeat, varying order of segments and the length of time between segments.
The image contains a musical notation page consisting of several musical instruments listed under different sections. Here is a textual representation of the notation:

- **Hn. 1, 3**
- **Vln. I**
- **Vln. II**
- **Vla.**
- **B. Tbn.**
- **Tpt. 1**
- **Tpt. 2**
- **Tpt. 3**
- **Tbn. 1**
- **Tbn. 2**
- **Tbn. 3**
- **Bsn. 1**
- **Bsn. 2**
- **Ob. 1**
- **Ob. 2**
- **Ob. 3**
- **Cl. 1**
- **Cl. 2**
- **Fl. 1**
- **D.B.**
- **Picc.**
- **Picc.**
- **Eln.**
- **Perc. 1**
- **Perc. 2**
- **Perc. 3**
- **Tym. 1**
- **Tym. 2**
- **Tym. 3**
- **Tuba**

The notation indicates various sections and movements with page numbers such as V1, V2, etc. The page numbers range from 3 to 4, and 203 to 206 are also visible. Specific instructions such as "pochiss r.t." and "to straight mute" are noted in the notation. The page also contains a section marked "unis." and "s.p." indicating special instructions or sections within the piece.
Double Bass: Bow slowly on either C/E or A string behind the bridge, changing bows freely (see page 1).
poco accel. .................. a tempo sub. (\( \bullet \) = ca. 64)