

ORACLE

by Elma Miller

for SATB

Commissioned through a grant from the Canada Council

**by the Ottawa Chamber Music Society
and
the Association of Canadian Women Composers**

Oracle

Programme Notes

The performance of *Oracle* should ideally be in a grotto or an amphitheatre lighted with torches or dimly lit. The singers should be arranged in a semi-circle; the three-legged stool for the priestess is optional.

Oracle uses as its “text” a section from Euripides’s *Ion*. The story is unimportant to us, only that a plea to the Delphic Oracle is involved. The words have been freely used, modified and re-arranged by the composer. The Priestess (the Pythia) may have uttered “incoherent” words like these in a state of divine ecstasy in reply to the questions of supplicants. A Greek chorus gives it’s own interpretation – we might say “spin” – of her utterances.

It starts in an orderly fashion, there is anticipation of the question and preparation for the trance-like state of the *Oracle*. As soon as the question is given there is a bit of confusion: what could this mean? The chorus is confused at the question and there is an argument. But the *Oracle* takes her spot and an uneasy calm ensues. Upon hearing her answer, there erupts trouble in the interpretation and the chorus splits into factions and then into chaos - all decorum is lost. The Priestess is ignored and in her third and final plea she utters in English, the vernacular (or into Estonian) to be understood directly by the audience. But in the end she finds herself alone with only the words of Sapho.

The Temple of the Oracle at Delphi sits upon 2 fissures and coincidentally the “tripodi” tri-footed stool for the Oracle is situated almost in the middle. In the ancient world, for about a thousand years, the Oracle at Delphi became the primary oracle for the dispenser of advice, no major decisions whether they be war, political or personal were made without having consulted her.

Elma Miller was born in Toronto and now lives in Burlington, Ontario, where she works as a freelance composer and music engraver. *Oracle* was funded by a Canada Council commission for the Ottawa chamber music society and the Association of Canadian Women Composers.

Elma Miller, 2007

Dur: 8:00

ATTIC GREEK PRONUNCIATION FOR "ORACLE"

Attic Greek is pronounced generally as you would Latin or Italian with the following possible exceptions or clarifications.

VOWELS (PURE)

- a: as "ah" not as in "and"
- e: in "bet", never "bee"
- ê: a longer version of "e"; not "bee"
- i: short, as in "hiccup"
- o: short, as in "opera"
- ô: long, as in "overt"
- u: as in German ü or u in French "tu"

A circumflex indicates a longer version of the vowel (not made into a diphthong as in English)

DIPHTHONGS

- ai: as "i" in "wine"
- ei: as in "may"
- eu: as "ou" in "you" after the "y"
- oi: as in "oil"
- ou: as in "row"
- ui: "we"

All other vowel combinations are pronounced as separate phonemes, e.g. in lochian the "ia" is i + a, two syllables, pronounced separately.

CONSONANTS

- ch: as in Scottish "loch"
- g: always hard "green" never "gender"
- gn: palatalised n, almost like Spanish ñ, think of the 'gn' in "agnus dei"
- h: a "breathed" h as in "hare"
- ph: as "f" (cf. "philosophy")
- th: as in "theorem"

RHYTHM

Maintain a steady beat. Keep an even stress. The music will guide you.

ORACLE

By Elma Miller
For SATB

Source of text: Euripides (480 – 406 BC)

[No translation is given as the text is treated as nonsense; the words are used for their sonic effect. Some words however, may be understandable but are not placed into a meaningful context.] Estonian translation by Elma Miller.

lôn (Choros)
se tan ôdinôn lochian
aneileithuian, eman
Athanan, hiketeuô,
Promêthei Titani locheu-
theisan kat' akrotatas
koruphas Dios, o makaira Nika,
mole Puthion oikon,
Olumpou chruseôn thalamôn
ptamena pros aguias,
Phoibêios entha gas
messomphalos hestia
para choreuomenôi tripodi
manteumata krainei,
su kai pais ha Latogenês,
duo theai duo parthenôi,
kassignêtai semnai Phoibou.
hiketeusate d'o korai,
to palaion Erechtheôs
genos euteknias chroniou katharois
manteumasi kursai.

Sapho:	The moon is gone and the Pleiades set Midnight is nigh Time passes on and passes yet Alone I lie.	Kuu on läinud ja ka Sõel Kesköö on käes Aeg viidab veel ja veel kuid Üksinda ma.
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ORACLE

In memory of A.P.

Elma Miller
music/text

Tempo ♩=76 Gathering of participants

4

f *dim. poco a poco*

Sop *Oo...*

Alt *f* *Ee...* *dim. poco a poco* *Ee...*

Ten *f* *Oo...* *dim. poco a poco* *Oo...*

Bass *f* *Ee...* *dim. poco a poco*

8

pp *Smoothly with no breaks (no glottal stops)*

Sop *Oo...* *Aa* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo*

Alt *mp* *ô - di - nôn* *Smoothly with no breaks (no glottal stops)* *a - ne - i*

Ten *pp* *Aa...* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo*

Bass *mp* *ô - di - nôn*

14

Sop *Aa* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo* *Aa*

Alt *le - i - thu - i - an* *ô - di - nôn* *a - ne - i - le - i - thu - i - an*

Ten *Aa* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo* *Aa* *Oo* *Aa*

Bass *ô - di - nôn* *a - ne - i - le - i - thu - i - an*

♩=84 Slightly faster

mp Menacing and threatening. Early anticipation of the question.

18

Oo Aa Oo a - kro-ta - tas a - kro-ta - tas Ni - ka
 ô - di - nôñ Oo a - ne - i - le - i - thu - i - an

mp Menacing and threatening
pp Calmly preparing The Pythia.

22

Aa ... a - ne - i - le - i - thu - i - an
 Aa ... Oo a - ne - i - le - i - thu - i - an

mf slide (like a moan) *rit.* *p*
mp *dim.*

25

(Aa) ... chro-ni - ou
 oi - kon chru-se - ôn chro-ni - ou
 (Aa) ... Phoi - bou Ti - ta - ni to man - teu -
 Uu ...

mp *dim.*
mp *dim.*
p

28

ma - ta
oi - kon chru - se - ôn chro - ni - ou
Uu ...
Phoi - bou Ti - ta -
oi - kon chru - se - ôn

32

(Uu) ...
(Uu) ...
ni to man - teu - ma - ta mes - som - pha - los
chro - ni - ou to man - teu - ma - ta mes - som - pha - los

35

mp kai ha man - teu - ma - ta to *f*
mp man - teu - ma - ta mes - som - pha - los *f*
mes - som - pha - los man - teu - ma - ta mes - som pha - los *f*
Phoi - bou *f* Ti - ta - ni to man - teu - ma - ta mes - som - pha - los