

## LIBRETTO

*Atlantic Odyssey Libretto* © Michael Polack 2013

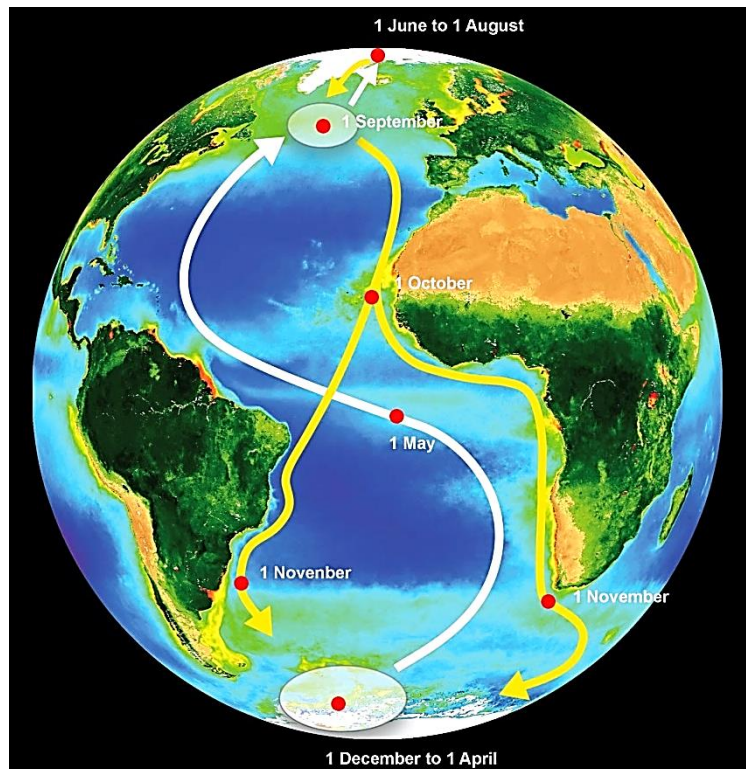
Each year for many hundreds of thousands of years the Arctic Tern has made its extraordinary, 40,000-mile Atlantic migrations from polar north to polar south and back – further than any other migrating bird.

***Atlantic Odyssey*** celebrates this yearly circumnavigation of the Atlantic Ocean, depicting through music and song the Arctic Tern and many of the places and events that the terns have passed over since the first arrival of humans on the ocean shores: the early seafarers of the northern seas, the monks of western Ireland, the love of women for their absent fishermen, the arrival of the first humans on the African coast, shipping through the ages, the arrival of Europeans in North America, the slave trade, Inuit and African goddesses of the sea, and above all, key moments in the extraordinary year of the Arctic Tern. It weighs no more than an apple and flies the equivalent of three times to the moon and back in its 30 years of life.

Through this historical and geographical journey, ***Atlantic Odyssey*** celebrates both this remarkable bird and the Atlantic Ocean itself, while also warning of the terrible damage being done to the oceans: through pollution, destruction of habitats and the melting of the Arctic ice.

Written for chorus and orchestra with soloists and a children's choir, ***Atlantic Odyssey*** also features projected images of the Arctic Tern's year and some of the places and events depicted in the music and song.

### Arctic Tern Annual Migration Routes



**Michael Polack, Librettist**  
**May 2019**

## Part 1

### 1. Perpetual Light

#### **Chorus & Children's Choir:**

Terns in flight, spanning the world,  
Terns in flight, bringing the light.

*Lux lucis et fons luminis,*

O light of light and source of light,  
Living a world ruled by the sun's rays,

*De luce lumen proferens.*

Bringing the light from the light.

*Dies dierum Illuminans,*

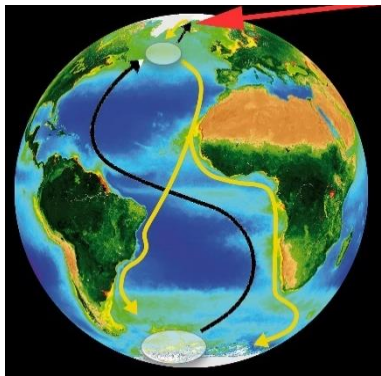
O day illuminating all days,  
Always summer in the world it spans,  
The days when daylight never ends,

*De luce lumen proferens*

Terns in flight, spanning the world,  
Terns in flight, bringing the light.

*The Latin comes from a hymn written by St Ambrose  
in the late 4th century.*

*The Arctic Tern is supremely a bird of light. It  
experiences two full summers in which the sun never  
sets. It arrives with the summer sun in both polar  
north and polar south bringing the summer days, and  
it experiences more light than any other bird.*



### 2. Bird on the Wing

#### **Instrumental, Chorus & Children's Choir**

Winter is fading,  
And sun's rays are gilding  
Grey clouds to the south;  
Waters flow ice-free,  
And snow drifts have vanished  
From pebble-strewn beaches  
And grass by the shore.  
Summer light is returning;  
Light and life are returning,  
Birds coming back to our shores, to our land, to their  
home.

Birds from the south  
Gliding out of the sunlit clouds  
Bringing the light,  
Seeking their nesting grounds

Warmed by the climbing sun,  
Dipping to feed from the fish of the sea,  
Bringing light and new life to our shores,  
Bringing light and new life to their home.

*Arctic Terns return to their northern breeding  
grounds at the end of spring. They breed in small  
numbers in Scotland and on the Farne Islands and in  
their thousands on the coasts of Greenland, Svalbard  
(Spitzbergen) and northern Russia.*

### 3. On the Beach

#### **Soprano:**

Spray on my face  
From the waves  
On the seashore,  
Wind in the grass  
Where the snow lies no more,  
Remember our childhood  
So long ago,  
Walking in springtime and  
Greeting the terns  
Gliding back to our shores.

Walking alone  
And recalling you  
Next to me,  
Wanting you here  
Not so far out to sea

*As she walks on the beach a young woman thinks of  
her loved one, who spends the summer months out at  
sea, and watches the terns coming back to the  
shoreline near where they live.*

#### **Baritone:**

Wait for me patiently.  
I will come back to you  
After the summer,  
When days turn to twilight,  
And the terns have gone south

Visit the birds for me,  
Braving their fury,  
Screaming fury,  
Recalling the times  
We went there in our youth

#### **Soprano & Baritone:**

One year together  
We'll walk down the beach  
With our children and visit  
The terns and their young.

Remember our childhood,  
So long ago  
Walking in springtime  
And greeting the terns  
Gliding back to our shores.

#### **Soprano:**

Walking alone  
And recalling you next to me.

#### 4. Fledgling

##### **Children:**

On the rocky shore at the edge of the Northern seas,  
A fledgling tern totters on a rock and calls,  
Sound drowned by the raucous din of hundreds of birds  
And by the pounding surf of the restless ocean.

Now the parent swoops to entice with salt sea eels,  
Then flies away circles and returns once again.  
The young tern flaps and the young tern hops,  
Rising to snatch at the parent's bill,  
And now it lifts again helped by a gust of wind,  
Flies to a boulder and takes its fill.

##### **Baritone:**

In this world timing is all,  
Where the wind, the cold, the fading light,  
Or a passing predator can snuff out a life.  
Escape while you can the approaching dark.

##### **Children:**

Now the young tern flaps, and it lifts  
Into struggling flight, borne on the wind,  
Stretching its five points to the air:  
Its black bill tip, its scaly grey wings,  
Gliding and gliding and riding the breeze,  
The thin white tines of its long tail trailing,  
All tinged with downy fledgling fur.

##### **Chorus:**

Now there begins the global flying,  
The ocean feeding, the sea-winds riding,  
Soon to flee from the growing dark  
Soon to seek out the clear bright summer light.

##### **Baritone:**

Below, the dark waters move and seethe,  
Home to Sedna, goddess of the northern seas.

*In just a few weeks baby terns hatch, fledge and are ready to fly the vast distances to the Antarctic, before the cold of the Arctic autumn returns*

#### 5. Sedna

##### **Soprano:**

I, Sedna, goddess of the ocean -  
Feel my fury in the tempest of the sea,  
In the thunderous cracking of the ice floes breaking,  
In the shattering blasts of the sea gale's screams.

I, Sedna, goddess of the ocean -  
Feel my fury in the tempests of the sea.

Feel my fury at those who betrayed me:  
My cowardly father who sold me for protection  
To the fulmar's foulness, giant creature,  
Holding me captive to his bird black rage.

Sense my anger in the shipwreck torments,  
I who escaped from my captor's eyrie  
To the boat of my father who threw me in the ocean  
Shaping his actions to the bidding of the bird.



##### **Chorus:**

Sedna, goddess of the ocean -  
Feel her fury in the tempests of the sea

##### **Soprano:**

Hacking at my hands as I clung to the gunwales,  
Chopping off my fingers at the bird's command,  
As I slipped for ever into icy-black water,  
Where my fingers formed the creatures of the sea.

My seals and dolphins, my narwahl and walrus,  
Whales and porpoises, all there to calm me,  
But beware all sailors when my anger rises  
And feel my fury in the tempests of the sea.

I, Sedna, goddess of the ocean -  
Feel my fury, my fury ...

*(drowned by wind and sea sounds)*

*Taken from Inuit legend in which Sedna was given by her father to the giant fulmar who took her away to his eyrie. She escaped back to her father but the fulmar demanded her back. Again her father was ready to hand her over and threw her into the icy water but Sedna clung on to side of the boat. Her father beat her hands with the oars to make her let go. In the cold her fingers broke off and they became her creatures of the sea, as she slipped below the waves and became goddess of the seas.*

#### 6. The Dread

##### **Chorus & Children's Choir:**

At the flashing white of the Arctic Terns  
As they swirl over nests in frenzy and shriek  
In a harsh cacophony,

Kri-a, kri-a...

##### **Soprano:**

I, Sedna, suck in my cold breath  
Like the sea's withdrawing wheeze,  
Blow out across my knuckled stumps  
A chilling Arctic blast that sweeps  
Across the autumn land and sea,  
Awaking again the crackle of the ice  
And the dark white polar freeze.

##### **Chorus & Children's Choir:**

At the flashing white of the Arctic Terns  
As they swirl over nests In frenzy and shriek  
In a harsh cacophony.

Kri-a, kri-a...

**Low Voices:**

Suddenly all screaming stops,  
 Vast colonies fall silent,  
 Only the roaring  
 Of wind and surf,  
 The moment of the Dread (Wind sounds)

**Chorus:**

And now the birds lift up  
 And fly and group  
 And southward head.

*As autumn approaches the screams of 'kri-a' and the swirling frenzy of the colony suddenly stop. There is a moment of silence, 'The Dread'. Then the terns rise up and start the long journey south.*

*Kri-a is both the sound that Arctic Terns make and their name in Icelandic.*

**7. The Journey Begins****Children's Choir:**

For decades to come  
 I will travel the globe  
 On translucent wings  
 Against sun-dazzled skies.  
 A five-pointed star  
 As I glide and roam and seek  
 My sun and summers  
 In north and south.

**Chorus & Children's Choir:**

I'm a bird of the sea and  
 A fish of the air,  
 Bird of the sun  
 And the dark pebbled shores,  
 My tail's a fish's tail  
 As I fly and hover and dive,  
 As I plunge into water,  
 Then rise to the sky.

For these are my elements,  
 These are my worlds:  
 The water, the air  
 And the earth and the fire.  
 I fish from the sea  
 And I fly through the winds  
 I nest on the ground  
 And I follow the sun.

And this is my world  
 To span as I track  
 Pathways of seas  
 And the continents' curves  
 The surge of Atlantic currents  
 And the wild ocean waves  
 And fierce sweeping blasts  
 Of the cold ocean winds.

*For the young tern this is where its life of journeying begins. With perhaps one or two years before it returns to the Arctic, it will fly the full length of the Atlantic Ocean from north to south and back for two decades and more. Wonderfully adapted to its world of earth, air, fire and water, it will travel the equivalent of three times to the moon and back in its lifetime.*

**8. Seafarer****Chorus:**

Maeg ic be me sylfum  
 Soogied wrecan  
 sithas secgan.

**Baritone:**

I sing a song of who I am  
 And tell my travels of  
 troubled times  
 And of heart's sorrow  
 and suffering grim.

I tell of terrible tossing on stormy seas,  
 Pinned in the prow on the night watch,  
 Fraught with fear at the closeness of cliffs,

My feet are fettered by aching frost,  
 With worries winding hot round my heart,  
 And hunger harrowing my sea-weary soul.

**Chorus:**

Forthon me hatran sind  
 Dryhtnes dreamas  
 Thonne this deade lif  
 Laene on lande.

**Baritone:**

You on land in luxury's lap  
 Nothing know of my salt-sea sorrow,  
 Suffering out on the ice-spray sea,  
 Separate from solace of human help,

My only comfort the swan's song,  
 The calling of the gannet, and the curlew's mournful cry,  
 The mewing of gulls, not the laughter of men  
 Or merry meals and mead hall drink.

In the dark of night on a surging sea,  
 My head and heart are worry worn  
 What the good Lord's purpose for me may be.

**Chorus:**

Forthon me hatran sind  
 Dryhtnes dreamas  
 Thonne this deade lif  
 Laene on lande.

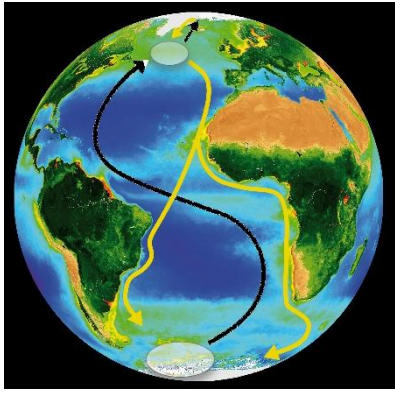
**Baritone:**

Indeed stronger for me  
 Are the joys of the Lord  
 Than this dead life  
 Spent here on land.

*Adapted from an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem written over 1000 years ago, this version draws on the first 64 lines of the poem. It may have been written by an early seafaring monk or preacher. Anglo-Saxon poetry makes great use of alliteration, the repetition of sounds, usually at the start of words.*







## 9. Astonishing

### **Children's Choir:**

The Arctic Tern's astonishing;  
It wings around the world;  
It covers greater distances  
Than any other bird:

Forty thousand miles each year  
From north to south and back.  
On wings of pearl with blood red bill  
And head of startling black,

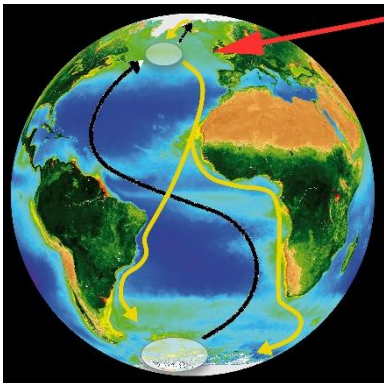
It weighs about a hundred grammes,  
Like an apple or a pear,  
But it rides the fierce Atlantic storms  
And battles tempest air.

### **Chorus:**

It mostly lives in harmony  
But has been known to fight  
And snatch the food from smaller birds:  
That's a kleptoparasite.

### **Children's Choir & Chorus:**

The Arctic Tern's a summer bird,  
It seldom sees the night;  
It wings its way from pole to pole  
To seek the sun and light.



## 10. Skellig Michael

### **Low Voices:**

Here on our mighty island rock,  
Thrust from the raging endless sea,  
Here at the end of the known world,  
We pray and worship you,  
Far from the noisome city lives,  
Washed by their seas of sin and doubt.

### **High Voices:**

Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
Inaestimabile sacramentum;  
Irreprehensibilis est.

### **Low Voices:**

As we climb to our  
morning prayer,  
Sandalled feet slap cold  
against  
The rock, wet, solid  
chiselled steps.  
Washed by salt sharp  
spray,  
Rushed on the winds from  
the surging sea,  
Smashing at our island steadfastness.



### **High Voices:**

Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
Inaestimabile sacramentum;  
Irreprehensibilis est.

### **Baritone:**

As I write and decorate your word  
By oil light in my cold stone cell,  
Birds fly and whirl about the rock,  
Gannet, puffin, arctic tern,  
Southward heralding the end  
Of summer winds and gentler times.

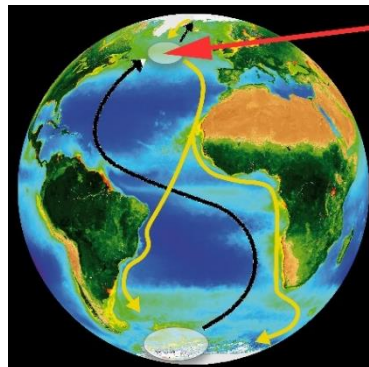
### **Chorus & Soprano:**

Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
Inaestimabile sacramentum;  
Irreprehensibilis est.

### **Soprano & Baritone:**

This place was made by God,  
A priceless mystery; It is beyond reproof.

*Seven miles off the coast of Kerry, south-west Ireland, the island of Skellig Michael was inhabited by monks between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Latin text, famously set by Bruckner in a motet, is adapted from Genesis (28:17) and is traditionally used to consecrate a place of worship.*



## 11. Mid-Ocean Feeding

**Soprano & Baritone:**

Young birds with parents now migrating southward  
 Close to the edges of European shores  
 Suddenly veer out into the sunset  
 To six hundred miles due west of the Azores.

**Chorus:**

Here terns have fed for a million migrations,  
 Where mountains rise up from the bottom of the sea.

**Soprano & Baritone:**

A mid-ocean frenzy of feeding and gliding  
 Over turbulent waters while seeking their prey  
 Through the crests and the troughs of the  
 mountainous ocean  
 Like showers of confetti in tempest-borne spray.

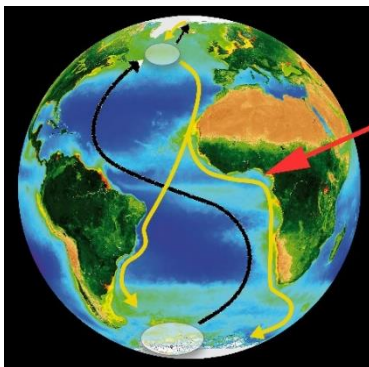
**Chorus:**

Here terns have fed for a million migrations  
 Where mountains rise up from the bottom of the sea.

**Soprano & Baritone:**

After three weeks of feeding from rich ocean waters,  
 They are ready to fly through the heat and the dark  
 Of the tropical regions with little to feed them,  
 And with instinct to guide them they group and  
 depart.

*Within the last five years it was discovered that Arctic Terns head out into the mid-Atlantic and spend up to three weeks feeding from the fish-rich waters above the high mountains of the mid-Atlantic ridge.*

**12. Niger Delta****Chorus:**

By the dark stained waters of the Niger Delta,  
 Blacker than the cap of an Arctic Tern,  
 People weep at the ills that befall them,  
 Hot with fury like the flares that burn

Who are the people who poison our waters?  
 Who is it profits from the wells that they drill?  
 Where is the money that we've long been promised  
 To clean the deadly oil that they spill?  
 Why was there money for the Gulf of Mexico  
 To clean the beaches of the rich man's shores,  
 While the oil slicks still stain our lives  
 Our cries for help the world just ignores?

The stench of oil and the dying creatures  
 Line the edges of our waterways;  
 Seabirds flounder wheezing, gasping,

Brown with oil as they end their days.

Now remember what fuels the cars that you drive in.  
 It's the oil that glues the wings that beat.  
 Remember when your house is all warm in the winter:  
 One creature's poison is another creature's heat.  
 We say that one creature's poison is another  
 creature's heat.

*Oil was discovered in the Niger Delta 40 years ago and it has made Nigeria Africa's largest oil explorer; but it has had a devastating effect on the Delta, on the wildlife and on the people who live there.*

**13. Paradise Terns****High Voices:**

Paradise Terns near the end of migration are  
 Leaving the coast now in exquisite motion,  
 Out from the Capes of the Horn and Good Hope,  
 Away from the lands of the Atlantic Ocean,

**Low Voices:**

Where sailors once followed the maritime pathways  
 The currents, the breezes, the pull of their oars,  
 Vikings in longships, Phoenicians and Berbers  
 Tracking the coastlines, exploring new shores.

**Chorus:**

Hudson, Columbus, Magellan, da Gama,  
 Tea clippers racing round Capes east and west  
 Filling their vast sails and finding the pathways  
 Of currents and breezes that carried them best.

**Baritone:**

Modern ships  
 brutally cut across  
 the pathways,  
 Battleships,  
 submarines, liners  
 and tankers,  
 Filling the waters  
 with oil and with  
 noise,



Factory ships sucking all the life from the oceans,  
 While little boats race out from small seashore  
 villages  
 Finding their livelihood stolen, destroyed.

**Children's Choir:**

Ah,ah,ah,ah!

**Baritone:**

Shipping that's harming the sea and its creatures,  
 The birds and the fish, the dolphins and whales,  
 With plastic and oil and the sonar confusion,  
 Snaring the albatross, poisoning plankton,  
 Changing the patterns of ancient sea systems  
 And filling the waters with pain and pollution.

**Children's Choir & High Voices:**

Out from the Capes of the Horn and Good Hope,  
 And away from the lands of the Atlantic Ocean,  
 Paradise Terns near the end of migration  
 Are leaving the coast now in exquisite motion

Borne on the winds, as the terns sweep on southward,  
Come whispers of voices from two thousand years,  
Ghostly refrains from hauling the sails in,  
Songs sung in harmony hiding their fears:

**Male Chorus:**

When I was a little lad and  
So me mammy told me:  
Away haul away, we'll haul away, Joe.

*Arctic Terns were flying the oceans hundreds of thousands of years, perhaps a million, before humans appeared on the planet or the seashores. In the early days of sailing, humans like the birds used the elements of wind and currents, the pathways of the seas. Modern ships cut across such pathways indiscriminately, soiling the seas as they go. The Latin term for Arctic Tern is sterna paradisaea, hence the title 'Paradise Terns', and paradise is a realm of perpetual light.*

**14. Ghostly Refrains**

**Tenors:**

Then away boys away! Away for Rio!  
So fare thee well, o my bonny young girl,  
For we're bound for the Rio Grande.

**High Voices:**

Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,  
Onward, the sailors cry.  
Carry the lad that's born to be king  
Over the sea to Skye.  
Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,  
Thunder claps rend the air,  
So carry the lad that's born to be king  
Over the sea to Skye.

**Tenors:**

In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty,  
I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone,  
As she wheeled her wheelbarrow  
Through streets broad and narrow  
Crying: cockles and mussels, alive alive o!

**Basses:**

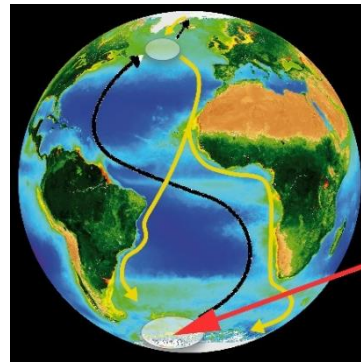
Blow the man down bullies, Blow the man down,  
Way-aye, blow the man down  
Give me some time to blow the man down,  
Way-aye, blow the man down.

**Children's Choir:**

When I was a little boy, and so my mammy told me:  
Away haul away, we'll haul away, Joe.

**All:**

Haul away, Joe.



**15. South Polar Seas**

**Soprano:**

Sweeping out southward, the Antarctic Ocean,  
A summer to roam,  
Resting on icebergs, their feathers renewing  
Or pausing on islands with black mountain cliffs,  
Wings of a thousand birds beating,  
Their return ancient patterns repeating,  
Terns sweeping free across south polar seas.

**Chorus & Children's Choir:**

Riding the storms of the summer  
And flying in crystal bright sun,  
Gliding the breezes, then hover like humming birds,  
Dipping to fish in the cold southern seas.

Ancient patterns repeating  
Regaining their strength through their feeding  
Terns sweeping free across south polar seas.

*Three months after leaving the Arctic, the terns arrive for the Antarctic summer, during which they will rest for three weeks or so while their feathers renew, on icebergs or rocky shores, and spend the rest of the southern summer flying and feeding across the Southern Ocean, experiencing, once more, a summer when the sun never sets.*

**INTERVAL**

**Part Two**

**16. Gliding (Instrumental) and Lux Lucis**

Terns in flight, spanning the world,  
Terns in flight, bringing the light.

**17. Lux Perpetua**

**High Voices:**

Summer storms sting and buffet,  
As the paradise bird glides and tips,  
Dips down and skims the sea;

**Chorus:**

Gusts flick its lightness; Its five-point balance  
Thin coral tail strings, Black crown, translucent pearl  
grey wings,

**High Voices:**

White streak of vibrant light -  
Drifts, spins away for a moment,  
Flies the wind, uses its element the air.



**Low Voices:**

There is no darkness here;  
This is the tern's true world of always light.

**Chorus:**

In the ice-sting dark of the winter nights  
Cold snow is the only light,  
But this miraculous dancer of the air  
Wings north away,  
Tracks the polar sun to her summer lair.

*After a summer flying and feeding in the Southern Ocean, the Arctic Tern prepares to follow the sun north.*

**18. A Million Wings Beating**

**Baritone:**

Now at the moment the terns know,  
They fly up from icebergs, from rocky shores  
And from riding the winds of the southern seas.

Now they sense the dipping of the sun  
And the chilling of the air,  
For terns know to read the seasons and the stars,  
The power of the moon in the twice daily tides,  
For they know to read the pull of the pole and the  
tilting of the Earth, in their twice yearly chasing  
Of the bright summer sun.

And now, where a hundred million years ago  
The mass of mighty continents slid slow  
apart, and surging waters of the Earth poured  
through the widening gap to form the new and  
growing ocean Stretching from pole to icy pole,

**Baritone & Chorus:**

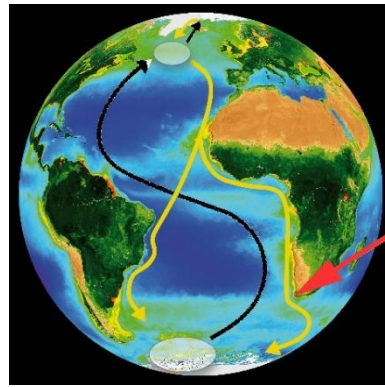
A million wings beating,  
their feathers renewed,  
delicate, elegant, beating  
the air. Powerfully swept  
By the circling winds of the  
southern seas.

To Pinnacle Point,

Where human beings first  
saw the sea,  
And now the terns' sun-  
seeking journey north  
begins.



*Across the Southern Ocean, Arctic Terns sense the moment to leave the edges of Antarctica. They pick the circling winds of the Antarctic Ocean that will carry them across the space, where a hundred million years ago continents slid apart to form the Atlantic Ocean, to the southern tip of Africa.*



**19. Since Time Before Time**

**Low Voices and Baritone:**

Since time before time we have trod the hot lands  
in search of rest and food.  
Animals we have sought and feared and fought and  
killed large beasts that roared, small beasts that  
writhe and crawled.

Now we have stopped amazed. Our travel ends  
There is only water and the edge of lands,  
Endless water that shines back the sun and the sky,  
A terrifying void that roars and cries  
And rears like vast beasts, thunders like storms  
And yet, offers us calm:  
Caves for shelter, strange foods in delicate pools,  
Water that will not satisfy our thirst,  
And yet, in this strange world we can find rest.

Large beasts like huge grey fingers  
Writhe and move in the water offering no danger,

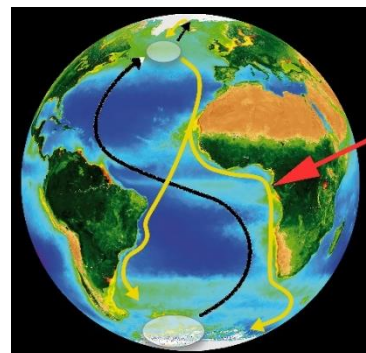
**High Voices:**

And bright water birds hover and dip down for fish,  
Fly up against the sun, light through their pointed  
wings.  
Screaming they circle across the endless water and  
away.

**Soloists and Chorus:**

Oh, to the movement of such birds my heart sings.

*Around a hundred thousand years ago humans were living in caves at the southern tip of Africa, at what is now Pinnacle Point. They are thought to be the first humans to have reached the Atlantic coast, having migrated over countless generations from present day Ethiopia. Here they would have faced a new and extraordinary environment.*





## 20. Yemaya

### **Soprano:**

I, Yemaya, goddess of the ocean:  
Dance, my people, on the golden seashores,  
Soothe my anger in the raging seas,  
Protect your fishermen sailing my water,  
By the stamping of your feet with your voices raised.

### **Chorus, Children's Choir:**

By the stamping of our feet with our voices raised.

### **Soprano:**

In the rhythms of your singing and the frenzy of your dancing  
In your words and your movements let my name be praised.

### **Chorus:**

In the rhythms of our singing and the frenzy of our dancing  
In our words and our movements let your name be praised.

### **Soprano:**

In the joy of your voices echo my sea-winds,  
Stamp your feet to the crashing of my waves,  
Smoothly moving like my ocean creatures.  
Perfect your harmony of sound and motion:

### **Soprano and Chorus:**

Harmony between man and nature,  
Harmony between the land and the ocean.

### **Soprano:**

In the rhythms of your singing and the frenzy of your dancing,  
In your words and your movements let my name be praised.

### **Chorus:**

In the rhythms of our singing and the frenzy of our dancing,  
In our words and our movements let your name be praised.

### **Soprano:**

Imagine me floating on calm blue waters,  
Billowing dresses like clouds in the sky.  
Feel my force in the tides' rise and ebbing:  
Sea goddess, moon goddess.

### **Chorus:**

Sea goddess, moon goddess, Yemaya, Yemaya!

**Soprano:** But beware the times my anger rises.

**Chorus:** We fear for our fishermen

**Soprano:** My anger rises.

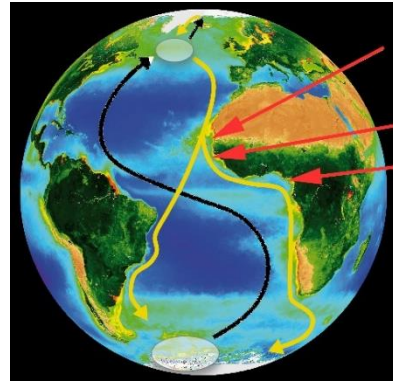
**Chorus:** And our seashore villages.

**Soprano:** My anger rises.

**Chorus:** Ay-ah!

*Yemaya is the Yoruba (W. African) goddess of the oceans, rivers and lakes, who is also revered today in parts of S.America and the Caribbean. Her name is a contraction of Yey Omo Eja, which means "Mother*

*Whose Children are the Fish." Associated with the colours blue and white, she is slow to anger, but she can show her fury in the storms at sea.*



## 21. Slave Ship

### **Chorus:**

Rattles of chains and shuffling feet,  
Cries of pain in the afternoon heat,  
Rows of suffering human kind,  
Whipped by devils into suffering lines.

### **Children's Choir:**

Why are our legs in chains, mother?  
Why are our legs in chains?  
Why were our fathers dragged away?  
And why do our compounds burn, mother?  
Why do our compounds burn?

### **Chorus:**

I have no answer to give you, children.  
Suffer we must at the hands of these men.  
Together we'll enter these  
dark wooden tombs.  
Who knows if we'll witness  
the light again.

### **Children's Choir & Chorus:**

Weep not mother; our gods  
will help us  
To battle the devils who  
break our lives.

### **Chorus:**

As they start the journey at  
best to slavery,  
A journey of darkness that few survive.  
Ignored by the men with their guns and their sticks,  
The thirsty, the hungry, dying afraid,  
The cries of the children, screams of the sick,  
Suffering souls in darkness laid.

Above this hellish cargo flying,  
Paradise terns flying free on the winds.  
Below the devils' victims crying,  
Condemned to hell by others' sins.

### **Children's Choir & Chorus:**

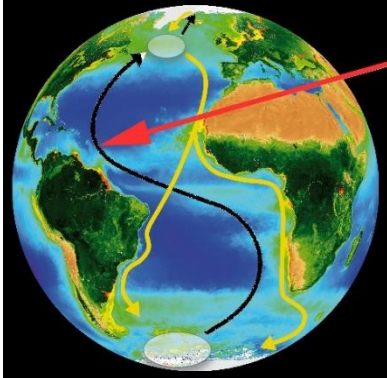
Weep not mother; our gods will help us  
To battle the devils who break our lives.



**Chorus:**

As they start the journey at best to slavery,  
A journey of darkness that few survive.

*From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century over 12 million (perhaps 20 million) men, women and children from western and central Africa were shipped by Europeans across the Atlantic in horrific conditions to both North and South America, where they were bought and sold to work as slaves.*



**22. Crossing the Ocean**

**Chorus:**

High overhead Paradise terns  
Are leaving the hell of the slave ships far behind,  
Picking the winds flying out west,  
Seeking the sight of the Caribbean shores.

*The Arctic Terns leave the coast of Africa, picking up the transatlantic winds, and fly west across the ocean, following much the same route as the slave ships. They then head north close to the eastern seaboard of North America, which first was discovered by...  
Who did discover America?*

**Tenor:**

Who was it found  
America?  
Where the terns  
now travel north,  
Who'd no idea  
what he might find,  
But still he sallied  
forth?



When Columbus sailed off westwards,  
He was looking for Japan,  
And he found some lovely islands,  
But it hadn't gone to plan.

There's Amerigo Vespucci;  
He has a claim to fame.  
He never made the northern bit  
But he gave both bits his name.

John Cabot sailed from Bristol  
And set foot upon some sand.  
With great originality,  
He called it New Found Land.

But even he was not the first  
To set foot on the shore:  
Leif Eriksson had visited  
Four hundred years before.  
He sailed and rowed from Iceland,  
And he stayed a year or more  
And with friendly people living there  
Struck up a good rapport.

Maybe it was an Irishman  
Who braved Atlantic weather;  
St Brendan claims he was the first  
In his vessel made of leather.

Who was it then first crossed the pond?  
Columbus told a mate  
Of a pair he met in Ireland  
In 1468 who'd floated in a hollowed log,  
Been wrecked in Galway Bay;  
So maybe they first crossed the pond  
But came the other way.

Who was it found America?  
Where the terns now travel north,  
Where folks have lived upon the land  
Ten thousand years or more?

So who then found America?  
Not those who gained the fame,  
But indigenous Americans.  
For they've much the better claim.

**23. How to Justify?**

**Children's Choir:**

Oil drilling, oil spilling  
Poisoned plankton  
Bird wings clogging  
Exploitation, radiation  
Acid oceans, coral dying  
Seabed gouging, scallop dredging  
Seafloor deserts, nothing living

**Baritone:**

How to justify the ways of men to birds?

**Chorus:**

All is not well and all manner of thing is not well.  
We have tainted their air,  
We have cut down their trees,  
Covered their nesting grounds, soiled their seas.

**Children's Choir:**

Water warming, icecaps melting  
Sea levels rising, low lands flooding  
Plastic floating, plastic granules  
Birds ingesting, stomachs clogging  
sonar screaming, noise pollution,  
decibels rising, whale confusion

**Baritone:**

How to justify the ways of men to birds?

**Chorus:**

For as long as we can recall we have looked up,  
Where over our heads went the birds,  
Free as we were not, singing as we tried to.  
We gave their wings to our gods and to our angels.  
We believed they knew things we did not,  
Could see things we could not.  
Once we thought to read our futures in their signs  
The set of their wings, changes in habit, rhythms of flight.

**Baritone:**

And see men rub their hands in glee  
At the promise of an ice-free northern sea:  
To sail vast ships where none have gone before,  
To drill the seabed, risk the pristine shores.  
Hell will never freeze,  
But what to do  
As the pure ice regions of heaven thaw?

**Chorus:**

Now we must learn at once to read the signs and fear,  
As species decline and disappear,  
For in a migrant's safe arrival  
Lie the portents of our own survival.  
So will we learn to read the signs and act,  
And treat their world with more respect?  
Oceans changing, currents shifting,  
Ice retreating, rapid melting...

*Julian of Norwich, an English mystic wrote: 'all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well'  
She lived from 1342 to ca. 1416.  
The line 'How to Justify the Ways of Men to Birds?'  
and the eight lines beginning 'For as long as we can recall'  
are taken or adapted from an article by Margaret Atwood (©O.W.Toad 2010)*

**24. Standing Alone**

**Baritone:**

Standing alone on the deck  
In the moonlight, terns overhead  
Flying back to our shore.  
Carry my love to her  
Where she now waits,  
Waiting in springtime  
And watching the birds  
Gliding back to our shores.



Standing alone and recalling you  
Next to me, thinking of you  
Far away on the shore,  
There on the shore.

**Soprano:**

I'll wait for you patiently,  
For you to come back to me,  
After the summer  
When days turn to twilight  
And the terns have gone south.  
I will visit the birds for you,  
Braving their fury,  
Screaming fury,  
Recalling the times  
We went there in our youth.

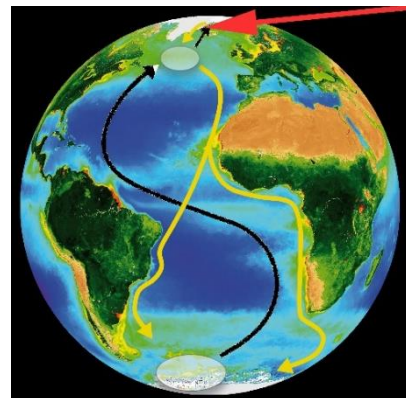
**Baritone & Soprano:**

Next year together  
We'll walk down the beach  
With our young child and visit  
The terns and their young.  
Remember our childhood,  
So long ago,  
Walking in springtime  
And greeting the terns  
Gliding back to our shores.

**Baritone:**

Standing alone  
And recalling you next to me.

*On watch at night on the deck the sailor sees the terns flying overhead on their way back to the shore where his loved one is waiting. He anticipates his return and walking along the beach with her and their young child.*



**25. Courtship Renewed**

**Low Voices:**

Now return the arctic sun  
And paradise terns  
To northern waters.  
Grasses start to green and thicken,  
And here terns pair again,  
Renew their lifetime bonds  
And nests prepare.

**Soprano:**

She on a post or a stone,  
Where he will find her again  
At a point both know,  
Where they meet each year,  
There she waits.



He sees her still, he hovers, calls  
And contemplates.

Chattering he flies, hovers, pauses, flips  
And dives,

Catches the fish that he wants,  
Flies to the place where she waits  
And presents his gift  
In their courtship rite now renewed.

*Arctic Terns tend to pair for life. The male and female birds do not spend the southern summer together but meet up again at the start of the northern breeding season, when the courtship ritual from earlier years of the male flying over the place where she waits and then catching a fish for her is renewed.*

## 26. Resting

### **High Voices & Children's Choir:**

Resting on the shore  
Now the long migration's done,  
Moment of stillness,  
Bill tucked under wing,  
Eyes that briefly close,  
Resting in the northern summer sun.

Wind in the grass, waves on the shore,  
Cycles of light and of life  
Begin once more.

## 27. The World Sings

### **Chorus:**

Oh the world sings to the movement of birds:  
To the albatross floating the airs of the ocean,  
To the gannet's plunging to the kestrel's hovering;  
And so the world sings to the movement of birds.

### **Baritone:**

To the beating force of the osprey rising,  
Fish in its grip to the nest returning,

### **Soprano:**

To the flicker of petrel skimming the waters,  
Spanning the ocean on its six-inch wings,

### **Chorus:**

To the lazy flight of the red kite drifting,  
To the circling menace of the vultures rising,  
The blur of the humming bird nectar sipping, The  
sweeping clouds of starlings roosting,  
The whistle and piping of waders calling,  
The creaking beat of the swans migrating,  
The mystery of all birds navigating:  
Oh! the world sings to the movement of birds.

## 28. Let Us Give Thanks

### **High Voices :**

Let us give thanks  
For the patterns repeating  
For cycles renewed.

### **Low Voices:**

Let us give thanks  
For the world and its oceans  
For all birds that fly  
With such exquisite motion.

### **Chorus & Children's Choir:**

Ancient patterns repeating,  
Now caring for young through their feeding,  
Terns renew life by the north polar seas.

Riding the storms  
Of the summer  
And flying in  
Crystal bright sun.

Gliding the breezes  
Then hover like hummingbirds  
Dipping to fish in the  
Cold northern seas,

Renewing life by the north polar seas.

### **Tutti:**

Terns in flight, spanning the world.  
Terns in flight, bringing the light.

*Atlantic Odyssey Libretto © Michael Polack 2013*

