

Hwilwæg

June 2, 2019

7 p.m.

Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

UC San Diego

Hwilwæg, for ensemble

Justin J. Murphy-Mancini

(b. 1989)

- I. Brittene igland
 (The island of Britain)
- II. mid ehatigum scipum
 (The expeditions of Caesar and Claudius)
- III. Her sendon Brytwalas
 (The Romans depart Britain)
- IV. Ða comon þa men of þrim megðum Germanie
 (The arrival of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes)
- V. and hi gecyrde to Cristes geleafan
 (The conversion of Æthelberht and Æthelfrith's victory at Chester)

Intermission

- VI. Ecghete
 (War)
- VII. þa wærword
 (Dooms and portents)
- VIII. Æþelred cyning and Ælfred his broðor
 (The expeditions of Æthelred and his brother Alfred the Great's Accession)
- IX. ymbe Brunanburh
 (The great battle at Brunanburh)
- X. Eadgar Engla cyning
 (The coronation and death of Edgar, King of the English)

Ensemble

Lauren Jones, *soprano*
Hillary Jean Young, *soprano*
Barbara Byers, *mezzo-soprano*

Anthony Burr, *clarinet*
Madison Greenstone, *clarinet*

David Aguila, *trumpet*
Rachel Allen, *trumpet*
Alexandria Smith, *trumpet*

Sean Dowgray, *percussion*
Daniel King, *percussion*

Mari Kawamura, *harmonium*
Ashley Zhang, *piano*

Batya MacAdam-Somer, *violin i*
Ilana Waniuk, *violin ii*
Shayla James, *viola*
Heather Vorwerck, *'cello*
Matthew Kline, *contrabass*

Justin J. Murphy-Mancini, *conductor*

I want to offer my deepest and most heartfelt thanks to the following people, without whom this project would not have been possible: Jessica Flores, Mark Geddes, and the whole production team; the dedicated performers named above; Katharina, Erik, Seth, Bill, and Anthony; Josh Levine; the ministers, staff, members, and friends of First Unitarian Universalist Church; the music staff at St. Paul's Cathedral, for use of their harmonium; and finally my family, perhaps most especially my father and grandmother for their steadfast and unwavering support.

Program note.

Hwilwæg is a kenning of my own creation, inspired by the beautiful tradition of forming poetic compound words found in Anglo-Saxon poetry. I do not presume that my kenning would be sensible to the inhabitants of England in the early Middle Ages, but it will suffice here. “*Hwilwæg*” might be understood in the following ways: “time-wave,” “time-motion,” “time-passing,” or perhaps “temporality” or even “while-way.” I want this word to be suggestive of the relationship between movement and time, with the underlying implication that, like waves, time ebbs and flows in an endless cycle.

Indeed, the Anglo-Saxons, from whose writing the text of this piece derives, counted their years by how many winters had passed. They were keenly aware of the cyclic qualities of time, and as many literate cultures of the time, encoded many forms of repetition in their writing. Epithets mark epic heroes (Hrothgar, the “Breaker-of-Rings”), chronicles repeat a formula in each entry (“Here the British sent to Rome”). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells a particular kind of history of the peoples who lived on the British Isles in the first millennium C.E. This is the story of kings and princes and earls, of kingdoms and their many wars for glory and territory, of the conversion of Celtic and Germanic cultures alike to Christianity – the “big” stuff. When reading entry after entry, one sees patterns emerging, of what kinds of content are worthy and how events are expressed. These patterns display stereotyped prose, most extremely in the case of the entry for 871 C.E., where King Æthelred leads an extended campaign against Danish forces, and each new description begins, “And then King Æthelred and his brother Alfred...” Frequently present also are odd digressions that have only tangential relevance to the preceding sentences, as when the description of the “original” peoples of the region veers off to discuss the arrival of the Picts at great length and follows with the formation of a single kingdom, Dál Riata.

During my time at UC San Diego, I have used Anglo-Saxon texts repeatedly, so I looked to this literature again when considering my dissertation project. The Chronicle grabbed my attention instantly, as its balance of newness and familiarity reflected back on my own interests in cycles and repetition, which have formed a foundational part of my music since at least 2006. I wanted to use this enormous body of texts as a springboard to create a not-quite-as-enormous piece that nevertheless retained a sense of the hugeness of its source. I used the idea of cycles to develop structures both within and between movements and to generate local material. These cycles are not mathematically precise but are instead calibrated intuitively, just as the seasons are not mathematically proportional nor the Chronicle entries rigidly repetitive. Into these cycles I have projected a world of sounds, textures, and shapes that emerge from the music for the voices.

Movements I through III open up the musical space, bringing onto the field a set of materials and ways of working with them – as the island is gradually populated by Celts, Romans, and Anglo-Saxons, I have explored different musical possibilities opened up by my approach to text setting. There is a lot of variation here, a sense of feeling out the new compositional space as the many characters fill in the narrative frame. As the Romans enter and exit, so do certain compositional options, but elements remain as markers of their former presence.

Movements IV through VI explore the early Anglo-Saxon period, beginning with their arrival from across the North Sea to their conversion and settling the available space. These movements introduce many new materials and structures, some foreclosed early and some maintained. Movement VI in particular represents a long period in the Chronicle wherein various factions battle for territory vaguely and unceasingly: I here represent that through a movement with no text that fractures the instrumentalists, forcing them to become isolated actors upon a common material palette.

Movements VII through X elaborate and focus the music as I take on three important events of the ninth and tenth centuries, when Anglo-Saxon influence was at its zenith. Æthelred's campaign against the Danes, Athelstan's victory against allied foes at Brunanburh, and Edgar's coronation at Bath represent major demonstrations of power by English kings and were recorded by the Chronicle as they occurred. We are lucky to have poeticized accounts of the battle of Brunanburh and Edgar's coronation as they contribute to an unusually broad vernacular literature for the period. These movements incorporate elements from all previous movements while aiming at an increasingly self-similar global structure. At once they are extremely varied and single-minded.

There is incredible richness in these texts from which one might draw inspiration – dozens of pieces could be written from the stories recounted in each short entry. Phrases like, “...clove the shield wall, hacked the war-lime, with hammers' leavings...” are vivid and evocative; in contrast, some important events, such as Æthelbriht's conversion, take place in less than a sentence, leaving us to imagine the impact of such a momentous decision. Through the passage of time, the meaning of some sections of the Chronicle fades until modern readers must reconstruct its importance: the digression regarding the Dál Riata means little now until one learns that this kingdom ruled the island of Iona, one major point from which Christianity spread to the island of England and a place mentioned repeatedly in later entries. I wanted to incorporate these varied distances into the music itself, creating sometimes clear and sometimes obscure relationships across movements, allowing the text to be sometimes more or less in the foreground of the musical texture. Harmonies may be familiar or strange in equal measure.

I have strived not to write an opera or an oratorio, nor have I attempted to set the texts to highlight the meaning of the words or to paint the evocative images. The singers are part of the ensemble, first among equals, in communicating a gestalt of the Chronicle within the larger gestalt of my own creation that stems from my reading and rereading the text. The singers sing an abstract music, inspired partly by the earliest notated music, some of which was written down in Anglo-Saxon England (the Winchester Troper). Some of the vocal writing extends the research done by Benjamin Bagby into the performance of Germanic poetry and prose into an imaginative landscape of my own devising.

This piece synthesizes many compositional concerns that I have explored especially during my time living in San Diego, which is probably good since it's my dissertation. I am very grateful that you have chosen to share this special event with me, and I hope that you find the music affecting. I hope that it is both beautiful and challenging, empowering and depressing, perhaps altogether too much, as only the fullness of living ought to be.

Translation of the text. (Translation by M.J. Swanton)

I. Brittene igland

A Topological Preface. The island of Britain is eight hundred miles long and two hundred broad; and here in this island are five languages: English and British and Welsh and Scottish and Pictish and Book-language. The first inhabitants of this land were Britons, who came from Armorica, and settled at first in the southern part of Britain. Then it happened that Picts came from the south, Scythia, with long-ships (not many) and landed at first in northern Ireland, and there asked the Scots if they might live there. But they would not let them, because they [said that they could not all live there together. And then] the Scots said: “We can, however, give you good advice. We know another island to the east from here where you can live if you wish, and if anyone resists you, we will help you so that you can conquer it.” Then the Picts went and took possession of the northern part of that island; and the Britons had the southern part, as we said earlier. And the Picts obtained wives from the Scots, on the condition that they always chose their royal family from the female side; and they held to that for a long time afterwards. And then it happened, after the course of years, that a certain part of the Scots went from Ireland into Britain and conquered some part of the land; and their war-leader was called Reoda, from which they are named Dál Riada.

II. mid ehatigum scipum

Sixty years before Christ was born, Julius Caesar, emperor of the Romans, sought out Britain with eighty ships. There at first he was harassed with fierce fighting, and led a great part of his raiding-army to destruction. And then he left his raiding-army waiting with the Irish, and went into Gaul and there gathered six hundred ships, with which he went back into Britain. And when they first joined battle, they killed the emperor’s tribune, who was called Labienus. Then the Britons went and staked all of the ford of a certain river with great sharp piles (stakes) in the water – that river is called the Thames. When the Romans discovered that, they would not cross over that ford. Then the Britons fled to the protection of the woods. And, with great trouble, the emperor conquered very many of the major strongholds, and went back into Gaul.

AD 47. Here Claudius, king of the Romans, went with a raiding-army to Britain and conquered the island and made all the Picts and Welsh subject to the Roman kingdom. He accomplished this battle in the fourth year of his rule. Here occurred the great famine in Syria which was foretold by Agabus the prophet in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Then, after Claudius, Nero succeeded to the kingdom – he who in the end lost the island of Britain because of his inactivity.

III. Her sendon Brytwalas

409. Here the stronghold of the Romans was destroyed by the Goths, 1110 years after it was built. Afterwards, beyond that, the kings of the Romans no longer ruled in Britain; in all they had ruled there 470 years since Julius Caesar first sought out the country.

418. Here the Romans assembled all the gold-hoards which were in Britain and hid some in the earth so that no one afterwards could find them, and took some with them into Gaul.

443. Here the Britons sent across the sea to Rome and asked them for help against the Picts, but they had none there because they were campaigning against Attila, king of the Huns; and then they sent to the Angles and made the same request to the princes of the Angle race.

IV. Ða comon þa men of þrim megðum Germanie

449. Here Martianus and Valentinian succeeded to the kingdom [of Rome] and ruled seven years. In their days Vortigern invited the Angle race here and they then came here to Britain in three ships at the place [called] Ebba's Creek. The king Vortigern gave them land in the south-east of this land on the condition that they fought against the Picts. They then fought against the Picts and had victory wheresoever they came. They then sent to Angeln, ordered [them] to send more help and ordered them to tell of the worthlessness of the Britons and of the excellence of the land. They then at once sent here a larger troop to help the other. These men came from three tribes of Germany: from the Old Saxons, from the Angles, from the Jutes. From the Jutes came the Cantware and the Wihtware – that is the tribe that now lives on Wight – and that race in Wessex which they still call the race of the Jutes. From the Old Saxons came the East Saxons and West Saxons and South Saxons. From Angeln, which has stood waste ever since between the Jutes and the Saxons, came the East Angles, Middle Angles, Mercians, and all the Northumbrians. Their commanders were two brothers, Hengest and Horsa, that were sons of Wihtgils, Wightgils was Witta's offspring, Witta Wecta's offspring, Wecta Woden's offspring. From that Woden originated all our royal family.

V. and hi gecyrde to Cristes geleafan

565. Here Æthelberht succeeded to the kingdom of Kent and held it 53 years. In his days [Pope] Gregory [I, the "Great"] sent us baptism, and the mass-priest Columba came to the Picts and converted them to the faith of Christ – they are the dwellers among the northern moors – and their king gave him the island which is named Iona, where it is said there are five hides [approximately enough land for five families]. There that Columba built a monastery, and he was abbot there 32 years, and passed away there when he was 77 years old. His heirs still have that sacred place. The South Picts were baptized much earlier. Ninian, who had been educated in Rome, preached baptism to them, whose church and his minster is at Whithorn, consecrated in the name of Martin; there he rests with many saintly men. Now there must always be an abbot in Iona, not a bishop, and all the bishops of the Scots must be subject to him, because Columba was an abbot, not a bishop.

605. And here Æthelfrith led his army to Chester and there killed a countless number of Welsh; and thus was fulfilled [Saint] Augustine [of Canterbury's] prophecy which he spoke: "If the Welsh do not want peace with us, they shall perish at the hands of the Saxons." There were also killed 200 priests who had come there to pray for the Welsh raiding-army. Their leader was called Scrocmil, who escaped from there as one of 50.

VI. Ecghete

VII. Ða wærword

793. Here terrible portents came about over the land of Northumbria, and miserably frightened the people: these were immense flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air.

VIII. *Æpelred cyning and Ælfred his broðor*

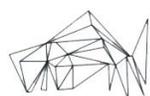
871. Here the raiding-army rode to Reading in Wessex, and three days afterward two jarls rode up-country; then Ealdorman Æthelwulf met them on Englefield and fought against them there and took the victory; and one of the jarls, whose name was Sidroc, was killed there. Then four days later King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, lead a great army there to Reading, and fought against the raiding-army; and great slaughter was made there on either side, and Ealdorman Æthelwulf was killed, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter. And four days later King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, fought against the whole raiding-army on Ashdown; and they were in two bands: in the one were Bagsecg and Halfdan, the heathen kings, and in the other were the jarls. And then the king Æthelred fought against the kings' force, and there the king Bagsecg was killed; and Alfred, his brother [fought] against the jarls' force, and there Jarl Sidroc the Old was killed and Sidroc the Young and Jarl Osbern and Jarl Fræna and Jarl Harald; and both raiding-armies were put to flight, and there were many thousands of killed; and fighting went on till night. And 14 days later King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, fought against the raiding-army at Merton; and they were in two bands, and they put both to flight and for long in the day had the victory; and there was great slaughter on either side, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter; and Bishop Heahmund was killed there and many good men. And after this fight a great summer-fleet came to Reading. And afterwards, after Easter, King Æthelred died, and he ruled five years; and his body lies at Wimborne minster.

Then his brother Alfred, [King] Æthelwulf's offspring, succeeded to the kingdom of Wessex. And one month later, King Alfred with a small troop fought at Wilton against the whole raiding-army, and for long in the day put them to flight, and the Danish had possession of the place of slaughter. And that year there were nine national fights [*folcgefeohht*] fought against the raiding-army in the kingdom to the south of the Thames, besides those forays which Alfred, the king's brother, and ealdormen and king's thegns, often rode on, which were never counted. And that year were killed nine jarls and one king, and that year the West Saxons made peace with the raiding-army.

IX. *ymbe Brunanburh*

937. Here Athelstan, leader of warriors,
ring-giver of men, and also his brother,
the ætheling Edmund, struck life-long glory in
strife round Brunanburh, clove the shield-wall,
hacked the war-lime, with hammers' leavings,
Edward's offspring, as was natural to them
by ancestry, that in frequent conflict
they defend land, treasures, and homes
against every foe. The antagonists succumbed,
the nation of Scots and sea-men
fell doomed. The field darkened
with soldiers' blood, after in the morning-time
the sun, that glorious star,
bright candle of God, the Lord Eternal,
glided over the depths, until the noble creature
sank to rest. There lay many a soldier

of the men of the North, shot over shield,
taken by spears; likewise Scottish also,
sated, weary of war. All day long
the West Saxons with elite cavalry
pressed in the tracks of the hateful nation,
with mill-sharp blades severely hacked them
from behind
those who fled battle. The Mercians refused
hard hand-play to none of the heroes
who with Olaf, over the mingling of waves,
doomed in fight, sought out land
in the bosom of a ship. Five young
kings lay on the battle-field,
put to sleep by swords; likewise also seven
of Olaf's jarls, countless of the raiding-army
of Seamen and Scots. There the ruler of



Northmen, compelled by necessity,
 was put to flight, to ship's prow,
 with a small troop. The boat
 was pushed afloat; the king withdrew,
 saved life, over the fallow flood.
 There also likewise, the aged Constantine
 came north to his kith by flight.
 The hoary man of war had no cause to exult
 in the clash of blades; he was shorn of his
 kinsmen,
 deprived of friends, on the meeting-place of
 peoples,
 cut off in strife, and left his son
 on the place of slaughter, mangled by wounds,
 young in battle. The grey-haired warrior,
 old crafty one, had no cause to boast
 in that clash of blades – no more had Olaf –
 cause to laugh, with the remnants of their
 raiding-army,
 that they were better in works of war
 on the battle-field, in the conflict of standards,
 the meeting of spears, the mixing of weapons,
 the encounter of men, when they played
 against Edward's sons on the field of slaughter.
 Then the Northmen, bloody survivors of darts,
 disgraced in spirit, departed on Ding's Mere,
 in nailed boats over deep water,
 to seek out Dublin and their land again.
 Likewise the brothers both together,
 king and ætheling, exultant in war,
 sought kith, the land of Wessex.
 They left behind to divide the corpses,
 to enjoy the carrion, the dusky-coated,
 horny-beaked black raven,
 and the grey-coated eagle, white-rumped,
 greedy war-hawk, and the wolf,
 grey beast in the forest. Never yet in this island
 was there a greater slaughter
 of people felled by the sword's edges,
 before this, as books tell us,
 old authorities, since Angles and Saxons
 came here from the east,
 sought out Britain over the broad ocean,

warriors eager for fame, proud war-smiths,
 overcame the Welsh, seized the country.

X. Eadgar Engla cyning

973. Here, Edgar, ruler of the English,
 was consecrated as king in a great assembly
 in the ancient town of Ache-man's city –
 the warriors dwelling in the island also call it
 by the other term Baths. There was great
 rejoicing
 come to all on that blessed day,
 which children of men name and call
 Pentecost day. There was gathered,
 as I have heard, a pile of priests,
 a great multitude of monks,
 of learned men. By then had passed,
 reckoned by number, ten hundred years,
 from the time of birth of the illustrious King,
 Shepherd of Lights – except there remained
 twenty-seven of the number of years,
 as the writings say. Thus nigh on a thousand
 years
 of the Lord of Victories had run on when this
 befell,
 and Edmund's offspring, bold in deeds of
 conflict,
 was nine-and-twenty years in the world when
 this came about,
 and in the 30th was consecrated prince.

975. Here Edgar, king of the English,
 ended earthly pleasures; he chose another
 light,
 radiant and happy, and abandoned this poor,
 this transitory, life. The children of nations,
 men on the earth everywhere in this native
 turf,
 those who have been rightly trained in the art
 of reckoning,
 name the month that the young Edgar,
 ring-giver of warriors, departed from life,
 the month of July, on its eighth day;
 and his son afterwards succeeded

to the royal kingdom, an ungrown child,
leader of earls whose name was Edward.
And ten days before, there departed from
 Britain
the glorious hero, good from native vine,
the bishop whose name was Cyneweard.
Then, as I have heard, praise of the Ruler
was felled to the ground, widely and
 everywhere
in Mercia; many of the wise
servants of God were scattered. That was great
 grief
to those in whose breasts bore in heart
a burning love of the Creator. Then was the
 Author of glories,
Ruler of victories, Counsellor of heavens,
too much scorned, when His law was broken.
And then also the bold-hearted hero Oslac

was driven from the country, over the rolling
 waves,
over the gannet's bath, grey-haired hero,
wise and eloquent,
over the tumult of waters,
over the whale's country, bereft of homes.
And then up in the heavens appeared
a star in the firmament which heroes, firm in
 spirit,
prudent in mind, men learned in science,
wise soothsayers, widely call
by the name of *comet*. The Ruler's vengeance
was widely known, famine over the earth
throughout the nation of men. Afterwards the
 Keeper of heavens,
Governor of angels, improved it, gave back
 bliss to each
of the island dwellers through the fruits of the
earth.