

UNTO THIS PRESENT

A CHORAL SYMPHONY (2010)

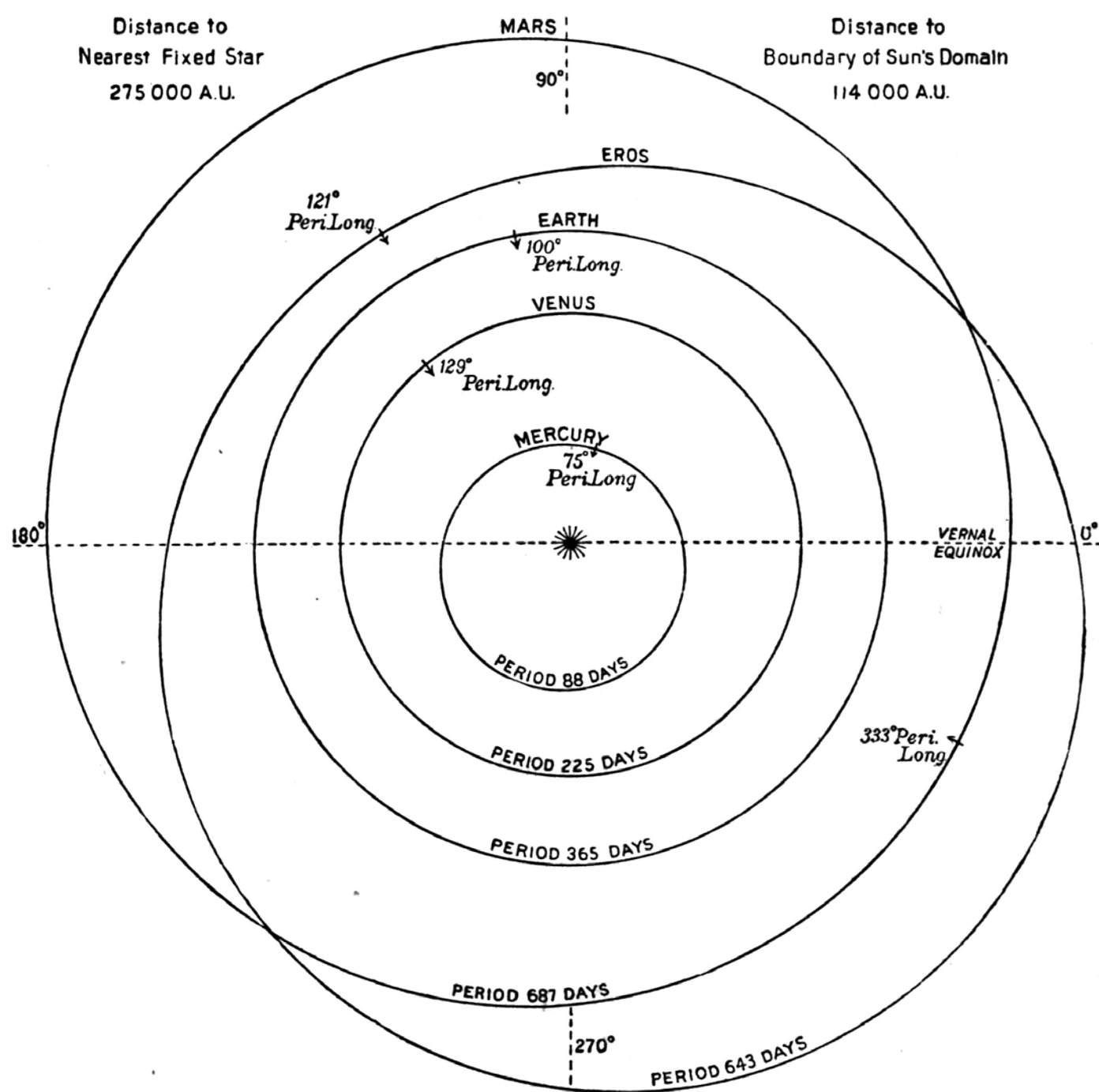


FIG. I. INNER PLANETS.

MUSIC, ORCHESTRATION & TEXT BY CHRISTOPHER LUDWIG
BASED ON THE POETRY OF LOUISA SARAH BEVINGTON

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes (Fl.)
2 Oboes (Ob.)
2 Clarinets in Bb (Clar. in Bb)
1 Bass Clarinet in Bb (B.Clar.)
2 Bassoons (Bsns.)
4 Four Horns in F (Hrns. in F)
2 Trumpets in Bb (Tpts. in Bb)
2 Trombones (Trb.)
1 Tuba (Tuba)
Timpani (32-30", 29-28", 26-25" 23")
Percussion I
 Vibraphone (motor off)
 Large Tam-Tam (Alternates with Percussion II)
Percussion II
 Snare Drum
 Bass Drum
 Tambourine

Chorus (SATB)

Violin I (VI 1.)
Violin II (VI. 2)
Viola (Vla.)
Cello (Vc.)
Double Bass (D.B.)

Score is Transposing

Total Duration: Approximately 60 – 70 Minutes

As Louisa Sarah Bevington wrote in "My Little Task" (1882), "What, with this fenced human mind, / What can I do to help my kind? / I such a stammerer, they so blind!" Bevington's concern for the individual human rights of her "kind" against the expanding power of British imperialism changed her life dramatically. Far from a "stammerer," she was a poet, essayist, and activist who represented the political as well as the literary scene of the fin de siècle.

She was born on 14 May 1845 to Quaker parents, Alexander Bevington and Louisa De Horne, at St. John's Hill, Battersea, in the county of Surrey. Her father's occupation was described as "gentleman" on her birth certificate; one of his ancestors had been confined in Nottingham Gaol with George Fox, a founder of the Society of Friends. Louisa Bevington was the eldest of eight children, seven of whom were girls.

Her father encouraged her in the observation and love of nature, and at an early age she wrote childish verses about natural objects. Throughout her career as a poet she used verse to express her love of science, poetry, music, and metaphysical thinking. Like George Eliot and Constance Naden, Bevington was influenced by the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer, whose evolutionist view of the universe and society she came to accept. Bevington sustained her belief in Spencer's theories throughout her adulthood; she developed a personal relationship with him as well, and Spencer's sponsorship led to her recognition among both scientific and literary circles.

Shortly after the publication of her second volume of poems in 1882 Bevington traveled to Germany, where in 1883 she married a Munich artist named Ignatz Felix Guggenberger without registering the marriage in England. The marriage lasted nearly eight years; by 1890 she had returned to London and resumed her career under her maiden name, never using her married name in public writings. As her attention moved towards society, she left Quakerism behind and began writing critical poems and essays while struggling to find a better solution for society's problems.

When she came back to England in the 1890s, she identified herself as an anarchist and wrote against the self-evident injustices and evils of late-Victorian England. In the years leading up to her death she became involved with anarchist groups based in London and also associated herself with international revolutionary movements. This political stance coincided with her contributions of poems and articles to anarchist and socialist journals that forcefully put forth a case for anarchism as a viable political philosophy.

By the mid 1890s Bevington was familiar with many London anarchists and was a recognized anarchist poet. She condoned from a political standpoint the use of violence as a final resort against institutionalized injustice, and privately she remained an atheist, refusing any religious ceremony for her funeral. During these years she suffered from mitral disease of the heart, but despite her declining health she remained dedicated to her creative and political activities. Finally, on 28 November 1895, after a six-month bout with dropsy, Bevington died at Willesden, Middlesex. Her death was reported a week later in London by a Helen Glennie, who registered the poet's occupation as "a 'wife' of Ignatz Felix Guggenberger, an artist painter," and her name as Louisa Sarah Guggenberger. Her obituary notice was carried by the 18 December issue of *Torch of Anarchy*.

I.

FREE, and yet fast; fast, and for ever free:
Led in the line of law to liberty,
Sweeping the spirals of invariant space,
On flees the little earth around her sun.
For ever tending to his fiery breast,
For ever tending to the outer cold;
So held, unfettered, among her desires
From either doom; and of her impotence
Driven, where hindrances are least, along
The curves of gentler possibility.

O little planet! fated to be free,
And have thy leisure for an era's space
To bud, and bloom, and grow a teeming thing;
Cooling, yet lifewards; darkening into sight
That wakes in many eyes of many lives,
And lights the living into wider light--
O little planet! Chariot of mankind,
Force-drifted from impalpability
Into thy rounded being, and the form
Thy children know thee by,-- how sternly kind
Is force, new-differenced as Life, as Love,
As fitness for a freedom yet to be.
Free, and yet fast; fast, and for ever free!
Thy history is written in parable:
Man's tale is one with thine, O little world of man!

II.

I looked into the green sea yesterday
And dreamt in outline of that sum of Cause
Which brought it there, and me to watch it curl
Its never sleeping mystery to my feet.

Although so far ago as now appears
Like never, yet I think there was an hour
Down the dim reaches of a cosmic Past,
'Ere the beginnings of the growth of things,
When Fact stayed, poised and centred everywhere;
And for one pregnant moment of suspense
The awful Infinite had nought to do:--
When universal forces nowhere clashed,
And all through space hung equal formlessness:
When, wrecked, some all-dissolved, older Past
Yielded its untired atoms for new work--
Or play--at systems churning; till there went
Slow, doubtful whirlings through immensity,
And sameness grew new focussed, here or there,
With glimmering, gassy nuclei. So, anon,
These, settling into fluid balls of fire,
Flung forth, all wildly spinning into space,
Planets, and these, all spinning, flung their moons;
Until, among an unguessed myriad more
This little thing we live to call our world
Grew individual, and puny shone
Among the millions: thence, self-centred, rolled,
An island of gleaming chaos through the cycled years.

III.

The young world's radiance ebbed away to night,
And a slow-settling darkness veiled her curves
As she a vaporous mantle for awhile
Drew round her broodingly. And in that gloom
The mystery, Motion, learned a strange new art
In subtle particles. Change after change
Smaller and stiller grew, and more complex
As Life began in the darkness. For 'twas then
Under a heaven all murky with the breath
Of young creation rising hot and thick,
Sprung that, which, lighted, had been loveliness.
Fern-forests, haply, at the steaming poles
Spread to the darkness beauty unbeheld,
And forms most gracious in the eye of day
Were born unheralded, and died in night
Nor so were wasted. What though living eyes

That turn ethereal quiverings into light
And use the light to find out loveliness--
Not yet were focussed from a vaguer force;--
Men, retrospective, in this later age,
Learn, by the trace of what they never saw,
A lesson worth the learning. Let it pass.

Dawn conquered even the long primeval night,
The blackness thinned, and wept itself away,
And let the light through from the parent sun;
And life began to know itself as life
In sentient things that joyed in some degree.
New inter-adaptation everywhere
Among material bent on issuing
At last in that supremest noblest thing
Achieved by all that has been--Consciousness!
The being who not only lived a life,
Loved, Joyed, and suffered, slept, and woke again,
But noted it, and recognized himself,
And found some words, and said "I am a man."

IV.

In yon far distance, where the sea and sky
Make of two meeting edges one thin line.
A boundary seems where yet no boundary is.
Being persists, and gradual,
All aspects melt in oneness as we move,
And spite of all our severing, ill-fit names
Cause, as effect, retains its force unspent:
One fact grows smoothly on through changing lights,
Stable alone in instability,
Unchangeable in constant changefulness.

In thine own piteous, piteous ignorance
Break not the calm, continuous tale of growth
Told by the tacit truthfulness of things
With theory of breach. O petty man!
Pause with thy rounded story, in mistrust
Of its full-bloom completeness! In the face--
The awful face--of deep, unfinished life
Cast thy neat sketch of things aside awhile;
Forget thy need of headings to thy page,
Or final flourish hinting all is said.
Learn of thy planet home, man-dazzled man!
The life of man is not the end of things.

For, not till earth hid all her fires away,
And gave but borrowed splendour to the night,
Knew she of greater glory,
And, in her children's vision, learnt to see the stars.

V.

Strong, sanely conscious, sweet Philosophy!
I see her dealing with the fevered screams
Of angry, over certain ignorance;
She measures men by what they tend to be,
Endures all honest lies right patiently,
Knows them for lies, but knows she knows them so
By knowledge that would make the liar true
Could he lay hold of it: unseeing one!

Grand, unrebelling sane Philosophy!
Crowned and calm I see her sit aloft,
Upon the apex of things knowable;
Her heart the stiller that it is so vast;
Her deed emergent from her gravest thought
As it illumines, and tempers to the fact
The deepest of her feeling. And around
Above her spreads the measureless abyss
Time, both ways endless:--all-ways endless, space.

O strongly patient, fair Philosophy!
She reads the midmost truth between extremes,
Dreams of the far point whither truths converge,
And, with a question in her thoughtful smile,
Ponders the poetry of paradox.
How highest knowledge waxes negative,
How he who soars the farthest in his thought

Basks in a beatific ignorance,
Knows by his knowledge he can never know,
Sees by the light of sight that he is blind,
And loves the largeness of the total sum
That lured him to be ignorant
ignorant and wise.

O just, harmonious Philosophy!
She links and interlinks the sciences,
Finds the coherence of a universe,
And oneness in the varied, wide-lived All;
Reads in a lump of dirt the very law
That rules the being of society,
Kinship between the atoms and the suns,
And reason for a virtue foreshadowed in a clod.

Time, both ways endless--all-ways endless, space.

VI.

There is a sense in which the universe
Is pivoted upon a molecule;
There is a sense in which eternity
Hangs on each moment
Read that sense reversed.
The softest dimple in a baby's smile
Springs from the whole of past eternity;
Tasked all the sum of things to bring it there,
And so was only barely possible;
Yet 'twas so one and equal with its cause
'Twould need that whole of past eternity
Cancelled and changed, and every motor force
And every atom through infinitude.
Set otherwise agoing, to hinder it.

The future lies potential in the Now;
The Necessary is the Possible;
The two but differing names for one stiff fact
That fact, the being of whatever is.
Is this dogmatic? It is the normal voice

Soughing breezes, and singing birds;
It comes to me across distant silences
Of interstellar vacancy at night;
It comes to me from human influence
Drifted through centuries, half-unperceived;
And in it is an all-embracing Code--
And in it is an all-inspiring Creed--
In what has been man learns the law of life,
Finds Revelation written as Genesis.

VII.

But now--what says Philosophy of Self?
What thinks her follower of the man he is?
Can he, in presence of the symphony
That rolls around him, played by viewless cause
On suns for instruments with Life for key,
And the For Ever we can only name
As metronome, to beat out rhythmic bars
Great æons long, in number, numberless--
Can he revert to his small destiny,
As worth a moment's stopping of his ears
While that sweet thundering of the huge "Not Self"
Challenge him to listen while he may?

Aye; for his egotism is not killed
But only stunned by vastness: now forgot
In the strong consciousness of larger things,
But yet, anon assertive; full of rights;
Measuring worth by "What is that to me?"
And so we look about us for a god
Whom we may bind in trust to work our welfare out.

VIII.

The tacit flux of unexplaining fact
That deals one recompense to one offence
Whether we call the doer "fool," or "knave;"—
The steady tendency that draws the child
Playing too near a precipice to death
And holds in safety every wretched life
That fails of chancing on the way to die;--
This tacit fact, this steady tendency
Breeds our experience, and makes us wise;
Breathes on our wisdom then, and makes us good.

O man! thou mad! thou blind! thou self-engrossed!
Let thy poor blindness be chastised to sight;
Grow acquiescent in the least award
Of Nature's fine impartiality;
Learn that what is must measure what thou dost,
That on thy knowledge hangs thy highest fate,
And all thy virtue grows of cosmic growth.

IX.

Daily we die, eternally to live,
Each in the measure of his deathlessness.
In the undying life of that strong thing
That once was chaos, and that shall be God,
But now is Man, and needs the lives of men
To learn its being,--weave its future by.
Freedom is born of fetters; joy, of pain.
For he who feels the gain of greater things
In his own loss, makes of his loss a gain,
And masters so the stern necessity
That so apportioned. When thy will is one
With what must be, with or without thy will,
Thy will grows helpful, and thine act is free.

For mastery is service perfected,
And, being won, yields back obedience
To laws of larger life. 'Tis thus we grow
And feel a world-pulse thrill our hopeful soul,
And feel our bark of life lift on the wave,
With progress, joyous, sure and palpable.

Free, and yet fast; fast, and for ever free!
Lured by a love-like law in lines of liberty.
Freedom is born of fetters; joy, and pain.

X. WHITHER?

THROUGH the fathomless peace of the starlight,
Through the feverish travail of mind,
Through the love of the live heart within me,
I search,--and this ever I find:

Totality, busy creating,
Through being, the law that I see;
A universe steadily working
The work that shall render it free.

When the patience of law universal
Shall issue in mastery of law,--
When the freedom that grows of the "must be"
Shall reign in its infinite awe.
When virtue is lost in its issue,
When sweetly hath blossomed man.
The fruit - Totality's travail--
The ultimate rest shall be "GOD."