

JOURNEY TO HORSESHOE BEND – cantata

Based on the novel by T.G.H. Strehlow

Music by Andrew Schultz

Libretto by Gordon Kalton Williams

CHARACTERS

T.G.H. (T.G.H. Strehlow, narrator), speaking part

CARL (the Rev. Carl Strehlow), bass-baritone

THEO (the young T.G.H., Carl's son), boy soprano

NJITIKA, speaking part

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

CHORUS (covering the roles of FRIEDA, MRS ELLIOTT, PASTORALISTS, GUS ELLIOTT, MEN AT THE BEND)

The Aranda portions are written in a number of orthographies

- Western Aranda, T.G.H. Strehlow's orthography, particularly for quotes from the novel *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*
- Western Arrarnta, modern Hermannsburg style for the hymns, Bible quotes and final chorus
- Southern Arrernte orthography as supplied by Doug Abbott for Njitiaka

*Scene 1: DAY. T.G.H, 60, speaks from his hospital bed.*

T.G.H.

It was only after I had suffered my own life-threatening illness that I felt I could tell my father's story and of his last journey down the Finke.

*Early morning sun. Light gradually floods the scene. Theo, 14, enters from the north.*

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

*(Whispered voices)*

That Strehlow...he was pretty important fella... We call him ingkata...that name for ceremonial boss.

T.G.H.

Tuesday, the tenth day of October, 1922. Lalkintinerama was lit up by the subdued glow of the sun, and 25 miles to the north west rugged Rutjubma towered up in unearthly beauty.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

That Strehlow was here...long time ago...when we was kids...

T.G.H.

It was 28 years since that October day when my father had arrived to rebuild the derelict Hermannsburg mission community. Now he was leaving.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

...tell us all about God, 'bout Jesus...

T.G.H.

He had to seek medical aid in Adelaide. 'We can't send you a car,' said Rev. Stolz. 'Place your trust in God.' *(Carl's chair is brought out.)* And both the buggy and the van would have to be got ready for the 380 mile journey south to Oodnadatta.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

That Strehlow...was important bloke...came here...long time ago...long time ago...we been sit down here...longa his church...

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

*(Wachet auf, Sleepers Wake! [1st verse])*

Kaarrerrai worlamparinyai! Jesula nurnanha ntangkama.

Kaarrerrai, Jesuka worlai!

Ingwa mpopa namanga, Ingkarta nurnaka pitjima:

Nthanha wonka inangkarlai?

Kapa rrakangkarra Lyarta inarrirrai! Halleluja!  
Ekurarna arrangkarra Rlarrakurlarra lhitjika!

T.G.H.

Most of the people had begun to sob long before the end of the hymn had been reached. Christ's parable of judgement had come to seem like a prophecy of doom. My parents had prayed unceasingly for days: 'Vater unser...'

*CARL, 52, is carried in from the north and placed in his chair.*

CHORUS

*(Impassioned)* 'Vater unser, Geheiligt werde Dein Name; Dein Reich komme; So geschehe dein Wille, Wie im Himmel So auch auf Erden, Unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute; und...'

T.G.H

All our belongings were packed in a van – we were to return to a home in Germany I'd never known. My father, so ill, travelled with my mother in the buggy driven by Hesekiel and I was to travel in the van with Njitiaka.

*NJITIKA steps forward.*

NJITIKA

Theo, this your place.

T.G.H.

'You are not just a white boy, you are one of us.'

THEO

I am a white boy.  
I am my father's son.

NJITIKA

You belong Aranda people.

THEO

*I play* with your sons.

NJITIKA

You one of us.

THEO

I am the pastor's son.  
I play...

NJITIAKA

You belong that Totem Twins of Ntarea.

THEO

...near the waters of Ntarea.

NJITIAKA

We take your daddy south.

THEO

Goodbye Mt Sonder, Hermannsburg, Range of Doom.

NJITIAKA

Then you can come back to us.

THEO

And then come back - ?

NJITIAKA

To us.

*CARL moves forward and THEO joins him.*

T.G.H.

Like the rockplates of Pmolangkinja my father had seemed immovable and indestructible. The buggy and van set off.

CARL

I stand strong.  
Frieda I've been  
A good and faithful  
Servant of God.  
I served my flock;  
I denied myself.  
I longed to see  
*The Rain Song of Kaporilja*  
*The Wind Verses of Ankota;*  
But I stand strong.  
I will not crumble.  
I withstand.  
I will not break down.  
I endure.  
Theo, I longed  
To see these songs,  
But stopped myself.

I serve my Father,  
Almighty God...

NJITIAKA

*(pointing out the landscape feature)* Pmokoputa.  
*(pointing it out)* Alitera.  
*(announcing)* Irbmangkara.

T.G.H.

Irbmangkara! the curlews of Great Wind Creek had fled wailing here after one of their brothers had been stamped back into the ground by the angry magpie of Owen Springs. Like so many Edens, Irbmangkara had known its fair share of cruelty.

THEO

Fish snap at the dragonflies...

NJITIAKA

You finish up eating now.

THEO

...who flit to the shelter...

NJITIAKA

Long way comin' up.

THEO

...of the bulrushes swaying...

NJITIAKA

Kwatye mwerre nhanhe. Good water here.

THEO

...at the water's edge.

NJITIAKA

Fill up the billy can.

THEO

I, like the great crayfish man...

NJITIAKA

Drink it later.

THEO

...Iltjanmalitnjaka -

Break through the gorge and see  
Table mountains at last.

CHORUS WOMEN ('FRIEDA')

'Und...

*NJITIKA, THEO and CARL move to the next point.*

*Scene 2:*

T.G.H.

Thursday, the twelfth of October, 1922,  
A sting in the air.

'FRIEDA'

'Vater unser, gib uns heute tägliches Brot und vergib uns...

CARL

Frieda, like spear jabs,  
Frieda, that daylight!

THEO

Trees, dotting the loamy flats,  
Trees I've never seen before,  
Rough bark, and skinny white limbs,  
Green leaves...what are these?

NJITIKA

*(excited) Tunga! (pointing) Tunga!*

CARL

Frieda, Henbury Station!  
Can it have taken  
Three days to get here?

'FRIEDA'

'...und vergib uns unsere Schuld...'

CHORUS MEN ('PASTORALISTS')

Listen, you're not taking those horses over sandhills are you?  
They're buggered –  
They're ruin'd.  
Listen.

You'n your missus  
Had best leave them here.

We've plenty of fresh and fit donkeys for you.

CARL

Please -

'FRIEDA'

'Und vergib...'

'PASTORALISTS'

Listen.

You'n your missus

Had best leave them here.

Use donkeys provided by us instead.

It's the law of the bush.

We help out our mates.

Your flash church cobbers should'a' sent you a car.

Don't refuse

our show of help,

It's what we have to do.

It's the way of living out here in the bush

Those folks in town, they have no idea

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR (*under T.G.H.*)

“Ngunatoa ragangkaranga konaraba namanga...

T.G.H.

My father looked into the eyes of these hard-bitten cattlemen with their Aranda concubines. He had rarely failed to attack sin vigorously from his pulpit...

CARL

John Eight, three to seven.

CHORUS

'Intalelintjamea-galtjindan-indanirberala bula, Fariseirberala tuta ekurauna arugutjana kngetjika erina etna...

T.G.H.

But truly these people were always the first to show their love when so-called good Christians had hardened their hearts.

CARL

'And then Jesus said:...

CHORUS

“Era kala pata arugulinjala erina iwutjika!”

‘PASTORALISTS’

Listen. Take my advice,

Try to get through  
Those sandhills by night.  
You’ll bake to a cinder during the day.

Go on ahead.  
Leave the van behind.  
The boy can follow later on.

On the far bank  
You’ll see that old gum  
Standing right up with its crown in the sky.

On the far bank,  
You’ll see that old gum.  
It’s standing right up with its crown raised on high.

*CARL moves forward leaving THEO and NJITIKA behind.*

CHORUS

“Era kala pata arugulinjala erina iwutjika!”

T.G.H.

‘He who is without sin amongst you, let him cast the first stone.’ My devout father averted his eyes from heathen practices. Yet he translated many of the Aranda myths and ceremonies.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

*(Wachet auf [2nd verse])*

Zion-ala marra wuma...

CHORUS

Sion hears the watchman shout...

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Ntarntararintja lyilhamanga...

CHORUS

Her heart leaps up with joy...



NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Zion parrpa kamerrama...

CHORUS

She stands and waits with eager eyes...

'FRIEDA'

'Vater unser... im Himmel...

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Tjina ekura ekarlta

'FRIEDA'

'Und verbig uns...'

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Alkirang'ilulhakarlama,  
Alkaralkara inthorra...

CHORUS

She sees her friend from heaven descending.

*Scene 3:*

T.G.H

It was half past two next morning when I was wakened by the sudden blazing up of the restoked campfire. Njitiaka rolled up the swags and untethered the donkeys.

NJITIAKA

Keme-irreye tangkey ngkerne lhetyenele!

T.G.H.

And we moved away from the cheery blaze of the campfire into the moonlit sandhill silence.

NJITIAKA

Unte irinterneme urnpe lhanhe? Lhanhe yurte-ipne urnpe. Unte irterleretyeke kwatye kweke ware nemenhe nhanerle.

THEO

Spinifex tufts -  
Kicked up by donkeys -  
Have such an odour,  
a certain smell?

Strange, lonely, dry;  
Moonlight, sandhills, silence

NJITIAKA

Werlethenaye werinerle irrkepe ngketyeke ingkwarle mpareme. Ilpele thwerte-nirre  
ngkeleme.

THEO

Desert oaks,  
Sighing,  
Their long needles swishing,  
Sighing, crying, calling...

NJITIAKA

*(pointing it out)* Pmere ngkweke lanhe, Kwatye pmere. Karte ngkwekeneke pmere.

THEO

Kwatye?

NJITIAKA

Ya, pmere ngkweke

THEO

Your home?

NJITIAKA

Leyeke pmere.

THEO

Taye parntyeme  
The moon is shining -

NJITIAKA

*(reprimanding)* Terlpe!

THEO

What?

NJITIAKA

*Terlpe* parntyeme!

THEO

*Terlpe* parntyeme?  
Showing our way

NJITIAKA

Unte arrtye irrtnelmelelyeke? Lanhe renye 'terlpe' itye 'taye'. (*Dismissively*) Western Aranda!

THEO

*Terlpe* larnnga-larnnga...

NJITIAKA

(*agreeing*) Awa!

THEO

Shadows, moonlight, sandhills  
*Terlpe* imerneme nwerneke.

NJITIAKA

(*pointing out the feature*) Perte nhake rei! Karalananga. Remember that one.  
Karanananga.

T.G.H

I remember.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR  
(*Wachet auf*)

Pitjai, 'Lunhilunhai,...

CHORUS

Karanananga...

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Inkarta Jesuai!...

CHORUS

I will never forget...

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Hosianna!

CHORUS

Ntarea,  
Land of my birth  
I will never forget...

THEO

Dear Rutjubma, Lalkintinerama, sunlit Pot' Uruna.

Criss-crossing cattle pads,  
Mazes in dust,  
Puff up under foot  
As the donkeys plod,  
Snorting, sweating, swishing with their tails.

T.G.H.

Near Idracowra we passed a hill standing close to the bank of the Finke. This was Tjina, and it sheltered in its caves the sacred tjurunga of the local folk.

'FRIEDA'

'...und vergib uns unsere Schuld...'

NJITIAKA

Itirkiwara! Rest here tomorrow.

*NJITIAKA and THEO join CARL at Idracowra*

*Scene 4:*

CARL

*(Reading his Bible)* 'Es war ein Mann im Lande Uz...'  
I can't lean back, pressure on my lungs.  
I can't lie down, terrifying pain.  
'Es war ein Mann...'

CHORUS

There was a man...

CARL

'...im Lande Uz...

CHORUS

in the land of Uz...

CARL

'Der hiess Hiob...'

CHORUS

His name was Job, a righteous man.  
And Satan said, 'God, let me test him,  
And see how righteous he remains.'

CARL

I can't breathe in, catching air in gasps  
I can't get cool, filling up with flames.

THEO

Cattle yard, cattle shed,  
Harness, bridles, hobble-straps;  
Meat house, meat bench, bagged meat, hung meat,  
The juice of steaks in the open air!  
Stockyards, fence posts,  
Gallows racks, top rails,  
Carcasses attracting flies

CARL

'Da fuhr der Satan...

CHORUS

And Satan killed his servants  
And killed his mob of sheep  
And covered up his skin with boils  
And sores from head to toe

CARL

'...und schlug Hiob mit bösen Schwären von der Fussohle an...'

THEO

Loghouse, iron roof,  
Rain-guage filled with sand,  
Bush beds of bullock-hide in a grubby hut...  
Camp oven, packing cases,  
*Bulletin* pages covering the walls.

CARL

I can't find peace, 'gerecht sein vor Gott'.

With all my might  
I must learn to pray  
'Thy will be done',  
But I want to live.  
I serve my God  
But I yearn for life.

CHORUS

But Job was good,  
And honoured God.

Why punish him?  
He'd done no harm.  
Why punish him, etc...

CARL

I need to pray  
The hardest prayer:  
'Thy will be done'.  
It can't be done.  
It can't be done,  
Yet it *must* be done.  
'Thy will be done'  
Must Thy will be done?  
I want to live.

CHORUS

But God cannot be known  
Nor made to answer men –  
No use in us demanding  
The meaning of our pain.

THEO (& CHORUS)

My father says:  
'Warum machst du mich zum Ziel deiner Anläufe, dass ich mir selbst eine Last bin?'

T.G.H.

'Why have you set your mark against me, so that I am a burden even to myself?'  
At six o'clock there was a sudden commotion in the camp. A cloud of dust could be discerned rapidly approaching. Within minutes the shape of horses and riders could be seen in the distant dust - Mrs Gus Elliott of Horseshoe Bend station accompanied by one of her stockmen and the messengers sent out the day before from Idracowra station –

CHORUS WOMEN ('MRS ELLIOTT')

Car broke down  
Come to The Bend -  
Telegraph there,  
Medical aid.

With the heat,  
Set off now  
Through the cool  
Of the night,  
Make The Bend  
By Daybreak

T.G.H.

My parents set off ahead of me.

*CARL moves to the next point leaving THEO and NJITIACA behind.*

T.G.H.

My Aranda companions and I retired to rest soon afterwards. We would have to leave Idracowra early next morning if we wanted to do the 35 mile stretch in one day. It was the first Sunday I had spent without prayers.

*Scene 5:*

T.G.H.

By seven o'clock next morning the van was already moving through the luxuriant giant saltbush flat which spread south towards the sandhill edges from the right bank of the Finke. Somewhere near its centre lay the sacred rain totemic site of Mborawatna. Idracowra Station itself was now indicated only by great clouds of red dust. For hot north-west winds had begun to roar over the countryside - the rain women were stirring in their sleep. It was one o'clock in the afternoon.

CHORUS

'They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.'

NJITIACA

*(pointing out the feature)* Kngeitnama! nhake raye perte kngerrtye! Perte nhake irrtnene Kngeitnama.

THEO

Kngeitnama? That mountain there?

NJITIACA

Kngeitnama. Irterleraye? Kngeye tname.

THEO

Kngeitnama, 'Father stands'.

CHORUS

Very hot

THEO

I long to think this means  
We're getting closer.  
I see the tall white rocks  
Are sloping down at last  
To sand and green banks.

Kngeitnama. 'Father stands'.

NJITIAKA

(*Always*) Ngampekale!

CHORUS

Hot, very hot.

THEO

The Horseshoe herd are grazing  
On clumps of grass.  
My father's tracks are here,  
Deep gouges in the sand –

CARL

'Es war ein Mann...

THEO

He lurched and plunged all night? Kngeitnama. 'Father stands.'

CHORUS

Hot, very hot...  
Half asleep...

THEO

My father says...

CARL & THEO

(*reprise*) Warum machst du mich zum Ziel, etc...

NJITIAKA

(*fanning himself*) Lyate mpweme nthwerre. Kngeitnama -

T.G.H.

(*very quietly*) - is standing, ever standing.

'FRIEDA'

'Vater unser...

THEO

He's never sick.

'FRIEDA'

'in Ewigkeit...



CARL

‘Warum...

NJITIAKA

(*pointing*) Raye!

‘FRIEDA’

‘Vater geheiligt...

THEO

Black pebbles underfoot.  
New hills blood red like fire.  
My father stands -

NJITIAKA

Close up now – little bit long way.

*THEO and NJITIAKA move forward to join CARL at Horseshoe Bend.*

T.G.H.

And so the last miles were covered, chain by chain, yard by yard, step by step. And then, when I was beginning to walk and to stumble like a sleepwalker, the van turned in a more easterly direction.

*Scene 6*

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR (*very quietly*)

Kaartai, nurna-nha wurlathanai

CHORUS

Horseshoe Bend is the eye of a flame  
Horseshoe Bend is the eye of a fire

NJITIAKA

Urte Rubuntja ntwe-irrke nhakeke.

T.G.H.

The Rubuntja men vomited over there.

NJITIAKA

Perte urrpwerle raye...

T.G.H.

Yes, the black stones.

Itne metyepenhe... NJITIAKA

They're from fire? T.G.H

CHORUS  
Fire  
Exploding spinifex  
Shrieking over sandhills  
Shooting from branches screaming  
Writhing from mulga, like pillars of  
Fire,  
Crackling torches of flame

Horseshoe Bend is a fiery place  
A land of burning cliffs

Nhanhe metyeke pmere. NJITIAKA

This is fire country. T.G.H.

Ngkape nhakele... NJITIAKA

That crow over there... T.G.H.

metye itekele,... NJITIAKA

He set all this country alight... T.G.H.

itekele ntgkernhe. NJITIAKA

in the beginning. T.G.H

Horseshoe Bend, etc... CHORUS

T.G.H.

Strehlow was coming to dread that his rock-like faith was about to be put to the final, crushing test. (*Reading Bible*) 'Und da das Haus gesetzt ward...' (*Putting Bible down*) 'And was the house built of stone made ready before it was brought hither?' Had God's hammer-blows succeeded in shaping him into a stone fit for that new Jerusalem? It had been a night when the temperature had not fallen below 90 degrees; when the easing of the hot northwest gale had only *increased* the humid closeness of the overheated atmosphere; when even those sleeping in the open air had felt oppressed by a sky that shut in as with a blanket the heat reflected against it during the day. My father sent for Mrs Elliott.

CARL

I have not many hours to live.  
God is silent.  
I know I'm dying.  
I think you know that too.  
But my wife does not know...

CHORUS WOMEN ('MRS ELLIOTT')

You'll be right...  
just rest now.  
You'll be up  
In no time.

CARL

Please comfort my wife when I am gone.  
Please help her and my son to get to Oodnadatta.  
They'll need supplies for the road.

'MRS ELLIOTT'

You'll be fine.  
Just sleep now..

CARL

And here's my last request.  
I can't do much to thank you for your many acts of kindness.  
Please shout the boys a cask of whisky.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Kaartai, nurna-nha wurlathanai.

'FRIEDA'

'Vater unser, etc...

CARL

‘Und da das Haus gesetzt ward, waren die Steine zuvor ganz zugerichtet, daß man kein Hammer noch Beil noch irgend ein eisernes Werkzeug im Bauen hörte.’

*(Wailing)*

‘FRIEDA’

‘...Wie im Himmel...’

CARL

Frieda, don’t say that prayer. Frieda, God doesn’t help.

*Carl’s chair, now empty, is carried back to Hermannsburg, upstage. Wailing dies down.*

NJITIAKA

Your daddy finish up now, poor bloke.

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR

Kaartai, nurna-nha wurlathanai.

*Scene 7*

T.G.H.

Long before sunrise the burial preparations had begun. Even now the floodwaters of the Alberga still blocked the track of the Marree doctor. Rev. Stolz said it was God’s will. My father was buried in the hard ground, and the station people sang *Rock of Ages*. The men slaked their thirsts on whisky in accordance with my father’s last wishes.

CHORUS MEN (‘MEN AT THE BEND’) *(as they drink)*

Cheers to old Strehlow,  
A man of the cloth.  
Not a bad bloke,  
For a man of the cloth.

Cheers to old Strehlow,  
A man of the Book.  
Not a bad bloke,  
For a man of the Book,

Not a bad bloke,  
For a man of the clod.  
Here’s to old bloke.  
Not a bad, cheers to him,  
Cloth of the  
Drain your glass, drink it up.

Here’s to old Strehlow

A man of the folk.

Cheers to old Strehlow, etc...  
He always done right by us poor bush folk.

‘GUS ELLIOTT’

Drain your glass, drink it up,  
Skol boys, a widow’s in grief.

*Scene 8:*

T.G.H.

It was Sunday, the 22nd day of October, 1922. The dull dawn of a listless morning broke over the stony landscape. I felt certain that my father had been meant to die. But why now, and at this desolate spot? Why at Horseshoe Bend?

THEO

I lie in the Finke  
Lingering link  
With Ntarea, Henbury, Idracowra

NJITIKA

*(Pointing north west in the direction of the Chorus)* Kwatye ngkarle – stormclouds!

T.G.H.

I wanted to be alone – somewhere by myself in the Finke bed, under its great red cliffs.

CHORUS

*Let the stormclouds wander over the land!...*

THEO

My father’s far  
From the land of his birth,  
Faraway Neuendettelsau

Why here? Why now?  
Stopped in mid-path?

T.G.H.

The rain women of Mborawatna were awakening from their sleep.

THEO

My father lies  
In Aranda land,  
In the land to which...  
He gave his life.

CHORUS

Io, io

NJITIAKA

*(Excitedly, pointing south now)* Raye. Kwatye ngkarle arrpenhe petyeme.

T.G.H.

More clouds?

NJITIAKA *(laughing)*

Itne ngkape renhe inetyeke.

T.G.H.

Those rain women get that crow always...

NJITIAKA

Ngampekale. Finish 'im!

CHORUS

The Rain Song of Mborawatna

*Let the stormclouds wander over the land!*

*Let the fury of the dust-storm wander over the land!*

*Let the stormclouds wander over the land!*

*Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!*

*Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!*

*Swelling rapidly, let their foreheads gleam white!*

*Swelling rapidly, let them wander over the land!*

*Swelling rapidly, let rain pour from them like [a river in flood!]*

NTARIA LADIES CHOIR & CHORUS

*(Wachet auf)* [3rd verse]

Gloria lyarta unkwanga. Relhirrperr', angel etna turta Harp-ala lyilharrirrama.

Pmar'ungkwang' intorta nama; Nurna throne-a unkwanganhanga

Irrkunngala 'tnarrirrama.

Alkng'itjala 'raka,

Ilp'itjala wuka Lenh'arrkana.

Nurn' unkwanga lyilhamara 'Halleluja' ngampakala.

T.G.H.

Hardly had I reached the shelter of the verandah when a deafening roll of thunder shook the building, and all its iron sheets resounded as though some huge, invisible boulder had

rolled down upon us. As the rain pelted and the country came to life the more I became reconciled to the events of the past few days. My father had wanted to go back to Germany. But how much more appropriate that his grave should lie in Altjira under huge cliffs amongst the people he loved and served.

Now came the darkness of a dying day...

THEO

My father's mound  
Fades in the dark  
Of a rain-wet night...  
The smell of  
Rain-soaked earth  
Fills the air...

NJITIAKA

Raye! That river's coming down, all that way.

CHORUS

This land is from Altjira.  
This land will always be  
The land of Altjira,  
This, the land of Eternity.

Pmara nhanha Altjiraka  
Nhanha pmara kutatha.  
Ingkarta anurnakanha  
Intama pmarala.

The land of Altjira  
Is the land of eternity.  
This land is from Altjira.  
This land will always be.

G.K. Williams, © 2003

based on the novel by T.G.H. Strehlow

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