COMPOSER STATEMENTS

I was so excited to be asked by Nigel Short to write a piece for Tenebrae to be performed alongside *Path of Miracles*. Tenebrae's recording of Joby's piece is one of my absolute favorites; I remember being bowled over by the instrumental quality of the opening, and then the combination of ancient chant and the composer's own modern voice. When I met with Nigel we spoke about the possibilities for this new work; it would need to be much shorter than *Path of Miracles*, but hopefully contain many complimentary themes, namely travel, solitude, and journeying.

While it is possible for *Footsteps* to be performed by Tenebrae alone, Nigel wanted a work that could also cater for additional forces – from single line children's choir right through to an expert semi-chorus. I can't wait for the work to be performed across the world by Tenebrae with other artists drawn from the towns and cities in which the performances take place.

*Footsteps* is the result of many months of researching texts to structure a narrative that cycles the seasons through the view of a lonely traveler who is constantly being moved on before being allowed to settle, finding comfort in the sky and stars above.

–Owain Park

*Path of Miracles* is a musical pilgrimage that was three and a half years in the making. After Gabriel Crouch had told me of his and Nigel Short's ideas for a new piece about the medieval pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella, I was taken to a Tenebrae recording session at the Temple Church, where I was utterly bowled over by the sheer beauty of the sound of this unique choir. A trip to northern Spain with my wife Claire and one-year-old son Maurice followed, and over ten magical days (and one distinctly unmagical car crash) we visited many of the important points of the Camino, including four of its greatest churches: the abbey at Roncesvalles in the foothills of the Pyrenees, and the great cathedrals of Burgos, León, and Santiago itself. The impressions these places left on me became the basis for the musical structure of the work.

Back in England I managed, with the help of The Poetry Society, to track down Robert Dickinson, whose poem “Proofs” about mediaeval French saints I'd read some five years previously. He seemed to me the ideal man for the job and so it proved, as he constructed a libretto of inspired reflections on the pilgrimage juxtaposed with extant mediaeval texts. In sourcing the latter, Professor Jack Sage of King's College, London, was an invaluable help.

*Path of Miracles* is dedicated to the memory of my father, Vincent Talbot, 1916-2005.

–Joby Talbot
Footsteps

OWAIN PARK
b. 1993, Bristol

Premiere
May 18, 2017; Holy Trinity Church, Hull, England

Performance Time
17 minutes

The narrative for Footsteps is a fusion of texts by eight different authors, five of whom contribute to the introduction of the work. "On Leaving" by Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda is a sonnet reflecting on the author's moving from Cuba to Spain; "Sea Pearl" could be describing the author's homeland, but here, when fused with "the wanderer's guiding star" (E. Brontë) alludes to the moon. Longer phrases which rise and fall in the upper parts of the semi-chorus are imitated more quickly in the main choir.

After the introduction, the narrative changes to the first person. "The Sun originates from Sanskrit Poetry, compiled around 1100 by a Buddhist scholar, Vidyakara, and was written up to 400 years earlier. After an energetic first set of statements from the main choir, the first line, "I praise the disk of the rising sun" is passed around the upper voices in quick motion as "Where every bird is bold to go" (E. Dickinson) is sung to slower rhythms in the lower voices. There is a sudden change in texture for "The foreigner before he knocks," as the movement stops and two parts are left hovering above, highlighting the last line of the stanza, "Must thrust the tears away" in the lower voices. An alto soloist introduces the "Time to leave" section, accompanied by a drone in the lower voices. The simple, direct melody is imitated by the semi-chorus, joined by high sopranos sirening above the tune.

The semi-chorus now take over and lead us into "Autumn." The traveler is slightly disturbed by the wind (reflected later in the piece by the fallen cherry blossoms), being alone and exposed to the elements. After this gentle lull, a mini-fugue inspired by Walton opens the first verse of Thomas Hardy's poem, The Year's Awakening. References to the "pilgrim track" and "belting zodiac" give this forward momentum, which only later becomes questioning. Repeating rhythms on a single pitch return, around which three-part harmonies weave.

Then, sudden outbursts represent rays of sunshine bursting through clouds. The repeating rhythms come to rest by heading downwards to reside on a mixed major-minor chord. As Gabriel Crouch notes about Path of Miracles, "The insistent discords of the second movement reflect...the hardships of the road." These chords are briefly used in a short quotation before reverting back on "tinct of spring." The questioning lone countertenor concludes this section, with an unresolved melody that contains the opening of the main fugue theme. The semi-chorus bid "Farewell" to Autumn with an interjection comprising sad, romantic harmonies.

The devil's interval of a tritone outlines the melody for the next section, as the wind returns. Counterpoint builds up from the low basses, capturing the weather in flowing compound time quavers. A more gentle section ensues, with lilting leaves gently falling, as the tritone transforms from a pivot point to the raised
fourth in a major scale. The chords are not grounded as root positions, and so the harmony is not allowed to completely settle until the open fifth on “midnight.” As the moonlight shines on St. Paul’s, the melody reflects the earlier part of the work, with the interval of a seventh prominent alongside distant non-harmony notes.

The second “Time to leave” section is in a lower key than the first, and is initially sung by a bass soloist over a low bass drone. The semi-chorus repeat the material, with the sopranos extending upwards before retreating to a new harmony for “The cherry blossoms,” a particularly evocative and beautiful text, tinged with sadness. Four-part chords with a descending contour in the main choir are refuted by an upward-moving soprano soloist, who concludes with her own rendition of the main theme.

As the work begins to come to a close, the music for the “Holy paths” pays homage to John Tavener and his work *The Veil of the Temple* – its scale and scope with unrelenting praise for the divine. A little of his language features in the climax of this section, as parallel chords with consonant scalar melodies form the bedrock around which flow eighth notes in contrary motion. Unworldly harmonies for “ceilings of diamonds” lead into the recapitulation, as the “pearl bowers” transform to the “sea pearl.” As the opening ideas return, the sonorities are slightly different with the use of D major in addition to the white notes of C major. A lyrical soprano melody over the top of the previous texture leads into the final few phrases, with the harmony evoking the unfinished dominant seventh as the footsteps are left continuing.

–Owain Park, 2017

*Path of Miracles*

JOBY TALBOT  

**Premiere**  
July 17, 2005; St. Bartholemew-the-Great Church, London

**Performance Time**  
60 minutes

The world’s most enduring route of Catholic pilgrimage was first formally acknowledged as such by Bishop Diego Gelmirez in the early 12th Century, but it has always belonged to a wider fellowship even than the Catholic church. Long before the body of St. James was discovered in Iria Flavia in the early 9th Century, and brought to its final resting place in Santiago; before the Saint even began his life of service, first as an apostle, and later as a preacher in Spain, the “Camino Frances” was under construction. Part of the route still runs along the sturdy Roman roads which were used to subdue and colonize northern Iberia. To the pre-Christians, this road followed the path of the Milky Way, and took its travellers to the end of the earth. Centuries later, it was used by the Moors to reach Spain’s northern outposts, only to be pushed back along it by Charlemagne, and served as an arterial route for the establishment of the Roman Rite and the purging of its Hispanic predecessor. Today it is used by tourists, travelers, and explorers, as well as by confirmed Catholics and the spiritually curious.
The musical traditions of the Pilgrimage can be traced to the mid-12th Century, when a compilation of texts attributed to Pope Calixtus II was created, all devoted to the cult of St. James. This so-called “Codex Calixtinus” was specifically designed to serve the needs of worshippers and pilgrims in Santiago, and consisted of five books. The first volume contains liturgical settings, including those for the two feast days devoted to St. James: the Feast of the Passion of St. James on the 25th of July, and the Feast of Translation of the Apostles remains on the 30th of December. The second and third volumes describe the 22 miracles of St. James and the journey of the Saint’s body to Santiago. Book Four recounts Charlemagne’s defeat of the Moors in Spain, and the final volume leads the would-be pilgrim through the routes, dangers, and customs of the pilgrimage. Of comparable importance to all this is an appendix which contains music composed using a technique which was just beginning to gain a foothold in certain parts of Europe at this time. Notwithstanding the fact that it rarely uses more than two voices, this is a highly significant collection of polyphony. And here, within this final section of the Codex, can be found the most famous of Jacobean chants – the Dum Pater Familias. It is this hymn which establishes the universality of the cult of St. James, interspersing Latin verses in praise of the Saint with a multilingual refrain representing the many languages heard on the road to his shrine:

Herr Santiagu, Grot Santiagu,
Eultreya esuseya, Deius aia nos.

The “Camino Frances” is the central axis of a network of pilgrimage routes to Santiago. Its travelers gather in Roncesvalles, a small town at the foot of the Pyrenees which in the spring becomes a veritable Babel as pilgrims from across the world assemble, before setting off in a southwesterly direction. The pilgrims carry a special passport – often this is one of the only possessions not discarded on the journey – and engage in the 850-year-old tradition of following the yellow arrows and seeking out the images of shells placed over pilgrim-friendly boarding houses. On the way, they stop off at any of a large number of shrines, most important among which are the cathedrals of Burgos and León, and at the foot of an iron cross near Astorga they may cast a stone from their homeland. The road takes them across the desert lands between Burgos and León and the rainy, hilly terrain of Galicia: and as the landscape transforms, so does the pilgrim. A pilgrim writes:

You have left behind the life you lived before... Dates become meaningless; a day is merely the passing of the sun from one hand to the other, from behind you to in front...
Then you slough off your worries. There is only one thing to worry about now and that is whether you and your feet will last the day. †

Somewhere between fifty- and two-hundred-thousand people arrive at the gates of Santiago’s Cathedral each year, at least eighty percent of them on foot. A good number of these continue on to Capo di Finisterre, a further 85 kilometers to the west, to reach what Europeans pre-Columbus considered to be the end of all westward journeys. An item of clothing is placed on a beach-fire to symbolize the old life left behind.

The four movements of Path of Miracles are titled with the names of the four main staging posts of the Camino Frances, though the textual themes within the movements extend beyond the mere

† Translation © Andrea Kirby, 1996
geographical. Throughout the work, quotations from various medieval texts (principally the Codex Calixtinus and a 15th-century work in the Galician language – Mirages de Santiago) are woven together with passages from the Roman liturgy, and lines of poetry from Robert Dickinson, the work's librettist. Talbot introduces his work with a vocal effect based on the Bunun aboriginal “Pasiputput” from Taiwan, in which low voices rise in volume and pitch over an extended period, creating random overtones as the voices move into different pitches at fluctuating rates. After a dramatic exclamation of the pilgrim's hymn from Dum Pater Familias, the beheading of St. James by the sword of King Herod is briefly described in Greek, Latin, Spanish, Basque, French, English, and German, initially sung by a lone countertenor rising above the choir’s sustained chord clusters. An account of the discovery of the Saint’s body in Compostella follows, some eight hundred years after his death in Jerusalem and the subsequent translation of his body on a rudderless boat made of stone.

The insistent discords of the second movement reflect both the hardships of the road, keenly felt by this time after some initial euphoria in Roncesvalles, and the composer’s own sense of discomfort on visiting Burgos.

The music trudges uneasily through this most awkward part of the journey, stopping regularly to recover breath and ease feet. There are stern warnings of human mischief and inhuman devilry, interspersed with musings on the mystical nature of the Saint’s translation. Robbery, lynching, and illness are the least of a pilgrim's problems; for just as the Saint can take the form of a pilgrim, so can the devil himself take the form of a Saint. As the laments and the warnings subside, the movement concludes with a line from Psalm 61, delivered in desolate, motionless tones from the lower voices: “A finibus terrae ad te clamavi” – From the end of the earth I cry to you.

Joby Talbot describes the third movement as a “Lux Aeterna”; and like the interior of the magnificent Cathedral of León, it is bathed in light. The journey is more than half complete, the pain barrier has been crossed and the pilgrim’s worries have indeed been sloughed off. A medieval French refrain, an ode to the sun in the key of C minor, punctuates simple observations of land traversed and hardships overcome. As with the previous movement, there is a steady, almost hypnotic walking pulse, but the steps have lost their heaviness. By the end of the movement the verses have arrived in the relative major, fused with the refrain which retains its original key. Mystical events are again spoken of, but this time with no sense of danger. Even the relentless sun, though it may dazzle, does not burn.

Meanwhile in Galicia the temperature cools, the altitude rises, and the rain falls. Towns pass by like shadows as the road seems to climb and climb, though León’s contended mood lingers. There seems no doubt that the journey will end, and at the first sight of Santiago, miles down from the summit of Monte de Gozo, the music initially draws inward, before bursting out in an explosion of joy. The pilgrim’s hymn is heard again, performed with the reverence and reflection of one who has finished such a long journey, and is quickly transformed into a spring revel from the Carmina Burana.

Path of Miracles, like so many pilgrimages, does not finish in Santiago. The journey to Finisterre, to where the walls of heaven are thin as a curtain, has a reflective, epilogic tone, a benign hangover from the party in Santiago. Here the pilgrim’s hymn is heard for a final time, now in English, endlessly repeating and disappearing over the horizon.

–Program notes © Gabriel Crouch