



Joby Talbot

Path of Miracles

1. Roncesvalles
2. Burgos
3. León
4. Santiago

Tenebrae entered the musical landscape 15 years ago as a choir deeply committed to presentation, as a complement to its unmistakable sound: the varied use of light, both natural and artificial, and the imaginative orientation of singers within a variety of sacred spaces have become hallmarks of the Tenebrae philosophy. It is appropriate therefore, as the choir reaches this notable landmark, that they should return to the piece that most profoundly encapsulated this philosophy in the group's early days – with fresh eyes, ideas, and voices – and pair it with the music of a composer who will unquestionably help to define the sound of British choral music over the next fifteen years. Joby Talbot's modern masterpiece, *Path of Miracles*, first performed in the traumatic aftermath of the July 7th bombs of 2005 which forced the cancellation of the originally-scheduled premiere.

Path of Miracles

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 colonise 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, travellers 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 Apostle's 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,

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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 Santiago, Grot Santiago,
Eultreya esuseya, Deus aia nos.*

The 'Camino Frances' is the central axis of a network of pilgrimage routes to Santiago. Its travellers 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 Leon, 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 Leon 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.

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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 kilometres 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 symbolise 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 geographical. Throughout the work, quotations from various mediaeval texts (principally the *Codex Calixtinus* and a 15th Century work in the Galician language - *Miragres 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 Leon, 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 mediaeval 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 Leon's contented 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 does not actually finish in Santiago: to complete the journey, the pilgrim must continue a little further to Finisterre, 'where the walls of heaven are thin as a curtain'. This final section 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.

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TEXTS

1. Roncesvalles

Herr Santiago
Grot Sanctiagu
Eultreya esuseya
Deius aia nos.

Eodem autore tempore misit Herodes rex manus ut adfligeret quosdam de ecclesia occidit autem Iacobum fratrem Iohannis gladio.

En aquel mismo tiempo el rey Herodes echó mano a algunos de la iglesia para maltratarles. Y mató a espada a Jacobo, hermano de Juan.

Aldi hartan, Herodes erregea eliz elkarteko batzuei gogor erasotzen hasi zen. Santiago, Joanen anaia, ezpataz hilarazi zuen.

Ver ce temps-là, le roi Hérode se mit à persécuter quelques-un de membres de l'Église. Il fit mourir par l'épée Jacques, frère de Jean.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James, the brother of John with the sword.

Um dieselbige Zeit legte der König Herodes die Hände an, etliche von der Gemeinde, sie zu peinigen. Er tötete aber Jakobus, den Bruder des Johannes, mit dem Schwert.

Before this death the Apostle journeyed,
preaching the word to unbelievers.
Returning, unheeded,

to die in Jerusalem –
a truth beyond Gospel.

*Jacobus, filius Zebedaei, frate Johannis,
Hic Spaniae et occidentalia loca praedicat, (1)*

foy el o primeiro que preegou en Galizia (2)

*Herod rots on a borrowed throne,
while the saint is translated
to Heaven and Spain,
the body taken at night from the tomb,*

*the stone of the tomb becoming the boat
that carries him back ad extremis terrarum,
back to the land that denied him in life.*

*Huius beatissimi apostoli
sacra ossa ad Hispanias translata; (3)*

*Et despois que o rrey Erodes mādou matar en Iherusalem,
trouixerō o corpo del os diçipolos por mar a Galiza (4)*

*From Jerusalem to Finisterre,
from the heart of the world
to the end of the land in a boat made of stone,
without rudder or sail.*

Guided by grace to the Galician shore.

*abandonnant à la Providence
la soin de la sepulture, (5)*

*O ajutor omnium seculorum,
O decus apostollorum,
O lus clara galicianorum,
O avocate peregrinorum,
Jacobe, suplantatur viciorum
Solve nostrum
Cathenes delitorum
E duc a salutem portum.*

*O judge of all the world,
O glory of the apostles,
O clear light of Galicia,
O defender of pilgrims,
James, destroyer of sins,
deliver us from evil and lead us to safe harbour.*

*At night on Lebredon
by Iria Flavia
the hermit Pelayo
at prayer and alone*

saw in the heavens
a ring of bright stars
shining like beacons
over the plain

and as in Bethlehem
the Magi were guided
the hermit was led
by this holy sign

for this was the time
given to Spain
for St. James to be found
after eight hundred years

in Compostella, by the field of stars.

*Herr Santiago
Grot Sanctiagu
Eultreya esuseya
Deius aia nos.*

2. Burgos

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,
The devil waits at the side of the road.
We trust in words and remnants, prayers and bones.

We know that the world is a lesson
As the carved apostles in the Puerta Alta
Dividing the damned and the saved are a lesson.
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven.

St. Julian of Cuenca,
Santa Casilda, pray for us.

Remember the pilgrim robbed in Pamplona,
Cheated of silver the night his wife died;
Remember the son of the German pilgrim
Hanged as a thief at the gates of the town,
Hanged at the word of an innkeeper's daughter.

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,
The devil waits at the side of the road.
We trust in words and remnants, prayers and bones.

Santiago Peregrino:

His arm is in England, his jaw in Italy
And yet he works wonders.
The widower, the boy on the gallows –
He did not fail them.

One given a horse on the road by a stranger,
One kept alive for twenty-six days,
Unhurt on a gallows for twenty-six days.

His jaw is in Italy, yet he speaks.
The widower robbed in Pamplona:
Told by the Saint how the thief
Fell from the roof of a house to his death.

His arm is in England, yet the boy,
The pilgrim's son they hanged in Toulouse
Was borne on the gallows for twenty-six days
And called to his father: Do not mourn,
For all this time the Saint has been with me.
O beate Jacobe.

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal.
We are sick of body, worthy of hell.

The apostles in the Puerta Alta
Have seen a thousand wonders;
The stone floor is worn with tears,
With ecstasies and lamentations.
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven.

Santiago Peregrino:

The devil waits in a turn in the wind
In a closing door in an empty room.
A voice at night, a waking dream.

Traveller, be wary of strangers,
Sometimes the Saint takes the form of a pilgrim,
Sometimes the devil the form of a saint.

Pray to the Saints and the Virgen del Camino,
To save you as she saved the man from Lyon
Who was tricked on the road by the deceiver,
Tricked by the devil in the form of St. James
And who killed himself from fear of hell;

The devil cried out and claimed his soul.
Weeping, his companions prayed.
Saint and Virgin heard the prayer
And turned his wound into a scar,
From mercy they gave the dead man life.

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,
We are sick of body, worthy of hell.
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven
And are not heard.
We pray for miracles and are given stories;
Bread, and are given stones.

We write our sins on parchment
To cast upon his shrine
In hope they will burn.

We pray to St. Julian of Cuenca,
To St. Amaro the Pilgrim,
To Santa Casilda,
To San Millan and the Virgin of the Road.
We pray to Santiago.

We know that the world is a lesson
As the carved apostles in the Puerta Alta
Dividing the damned and the saved are a lesson.
We pray the watching saints will help us learn.

*Ora pro nobis, Jacobe,
A finibus terrae ad te clamavi. (6)*

3. Leon

*Li soleus qui en moi luist est mes deduis,
Et Dieus est mon conduis.(7)*

We have walked
In Jakobsland:

Over river and sheep track,
By hospice and hermit's cave.

We sleep on the earth and dream of the road,
We wake to the road and we walk.

Wind from the hills
Dry as the road,

Sun overhead,
Too bright for the eye.

*Li soleus qui en moi luist est mes deduis,
Et Dieus est mon conduis. (8)*

Rumours of grace on the road,
Of wonders:

The miracles of Villasirga,
The Virgin in the apple tree.

The Apostle on horseback –
A journey of days in one night.

God knows we have walked
In Jakobsland:

Through the Gothic Fields,
From Castrogeriz to Calzadilla,

Calzadilla to Sahagun,
Each day the same road, the same sun.

Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Dominum virtutem.(9)

Here is a miracle.
That we are here is a miracle.

Here daylight gives an image of
The heaven promised by His love.

*Beate, qui habitant in domo tua, Domine;
In saecula saeculorum laudabant te.* (10)

We pause, as at the heart of a sun
That dazzles and does not burn.

4. Santiago

The road climbs through changing land.
Northern rains fall
On the deepening green of the slopes of the valley,
Storms break the summer's heat;
At Foncebadon a pass can be lost,
In one night, to the snow.

The road climbs for days through the highlands of Bierzo,
to the grassland and rocks
of the Valcarce valley.
White broom and scrub-oak,
Laburnum and gorse
Mark the bare hills
Beside the road.

At O Cebreiro, mountains.
The road follows the ridgetop
By meadows of fern, by fields of rye.

By Fonfria del Camino, by Triacastela.
Towns are shadows
The road leaves behind.
It moves over the slate hills
Palas do Rei. Potomarin.
The names are shadows.

Then, from the stream at Lavacolla
To the foot of Monte de Gozo,
A morning;
From the foot of Monte de Gozo
To the summit of Monte de Gozo
The road climbs,

Before the longed-for final descent
To Santiago.

Herr Santiago
Grot Sanctiagu
Eultreya esuseya
Deius aia nos.

Ver rediv optatum
Cum gaudio,
Flore decoratum
Purpureo;
Aves edunt cantus
Quam dulciter,
Cantus est amoenus
Totaliter. (11)

Jacobo dat parium
Omnis mundus gratis
Ob cuius remedium
Miles pietatis
Cunctorum presidium
Est ad vota satis. (12)

O beate Jacobe
Virtus nostra vere
Nobis hostes remove
Tuos ac tuere
Ac devotos adibe
Nos tibi placere. (13)

Jacobo propicio
Veniam speramus
Et quas ex obsequio
Merito debemus
Patri tam eximio
Dignes laudes demus (14)

At the Western edge of the world
We pray for our sins to fall from us
As chains from the limbs of penitents.

We have walked out of the lives we had
And will return to nothing, if we live,
Changed by the journey, face and soul alike.

We have walked out of our lives
To come to where the walls of heaven
Are thin as a curtain, transparent as glass,

Where the Apostle spoke the holy words,
Where in death he returned, where God is close,

Where saints and martyrs mark the road.

Santiago, primus ex apostolis,
Defender of pilgrims, warrior for truth,
Take from our backs the burdens of this life,

What we have done, who we have been;
Take them as fire takes the cloth
They cast into the sea at Finisterre.

Holy St James, great St. James,
God help us now and evermore.

Robert Dickinson

NOTES:

1. James, son of Zebedee, brother of John, at that time preached in Spain and the western places. - *Breviarium apostolorum*, C8th.
2. He was the first to preach in Galicia - *Mirages de Santiago*, C15th (Gallegan).
3. The sacred bones of the blessed apostle taken to Spain - Floro, C8th.
4. After King Herod killed him in Jerusalem, his disciples took the body by sea to Galicia - *Mirages de Santiago*.
5. Abandoning to Providence the care of the tomb - *Legenda* (Fr).
6. From the end of the earth I cry to you - Psalm 61.
7. The sun that shines within me is my joy, and God is my guide. - Anon, C13th.
8. The sun that shines within me is my joy, and God is my guide. - Anon, 13th century.
9. How admirable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts. *Psalm 84*.
10. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will still be praising be. - *Ibid*.
11. Longed-for spring returns, with joy, adorned with shining flowers. The birds sing so sweetly, the woods burst into leaf, there is pleasant song on every side. - *Carmina Burana*.
12. The whole world freely gives thanks to James; through his sacrifice, he, the warrior of godliness, is a great defence to all through their prayers. - *Dum Pater Familias*.
13. O blessed James, truly our strength, take our enemies from us and protect your people, and cause us, your faithful servants, to please you.
14. James, let us hope for pardon through your favour, and let us give the worthy praise, which we rightfully owe to so excellent a father.

Path of Miracles was premiered at the City of London Festival in July 2005, performed by Tenebrae, conducted by Nigel Short and directed by Ceri Sherlock. Tenebrae would very much like to register its lasting gratitude to the late Barbara Pollock for the commission of *Path of Miracles*, and Leroy and Fran Harvey for all their assistance at the time.