

Ecclesiastes

Libretto

- freely adapted from the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, in different translations, by the composer.

I. Introduction

Pointless!
(takes a deep breath)

Pointless!
Pointless!
Utterly meaningless!
Nothing matters!
What do I gain from all my work?

The sun rises.
The sun sets.
And there is nothing new under the sun.
Everything is wearisome.
Words are tiring;
No one is able to speak.
My eye is not satisfied with seeing.
My ear is not filled up with hearing.

Whatever has happened is what will happen again.
I have seen each and every thing that happens,
And it is all pointless,
Feeding on wind.

II. Wisdom

I studied to understand wisdom and knowledge.

In much wisdom is much grief;
The more knowledge, the more suffering.
I said to myself,
"I will distract myself with pleasure and enjoy good things";
But this too was pointless.

I did see that wisdom is more useful than foolishness,
Just as light is more useful than darkness.
But, if the same thing happens to the fool as to me,
Then what do I gain by trying to be wise?

Pointless!
Feeding on wind!

The same fate awaits all.

III. Building

I went to find out: "What should I do with the short time we have to live.

I worked on a grand scale -
I built palaces, planted vineyards, and made gardens and parks;
In them I planted all kinds of fruit trees.
I made myself pools from which to water the trees springing up in the forest.

I amassed silver and gold, the wealth of kings and provinces.
I withheld no pleasure from myself;
For I took pleasure in all my work,
And this was my reward.

But, the lover of money never has enough.

I looked at all that my hands had accomplished,
And saw that it was meaningless, feeding on wind,
And that there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Just as I came from my mother's womb, so I will go back naked,
And for my efforts I will take nothing that I can carry in my hand.

IV. Despair

And so I came to hate life,
Because everything I did was loathsome to me,
Since everything is meaningless and feeding on wind.
For what do we get from all our efforts and ambitions?

A life of eating in darkness, in frustration, in sickness and in anger.
Our whole life is one of pain, and our work is full of stress.

Even at night my mind gets no rest.
It is all pointless!

V. Balance

And yet, For everything there is a season,
A right time for every intention under the sun -
A time to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to uproot,
A time to kill and a time to heal,
A time to tear down and a time to build,
A time to weep and a time to laugh,
A time to mourn and a time to dance,
A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones,
A time to embrace and a time to refrain,
A time to search and a time to give up,
A time to keep and a time to discard,
A time to tear and a time to sew,
A time to keep silent and a time to speak,
A time to love and a time to hate,
A time for war and a time for peace.
Everything is suited to its time.

VI. Injustice

Another thing I observed "under the sun"...

I saw the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them.
Power was on the side of their oppressors, and they had no one to comfort them.

Things happen to righteous people as if they were doing wicked deeds;
Things happen to wicked people as if they were doing righteous deeds.

There, in the same place as justice, was wickedness;
There, in the same place as righteousness, was wickedness.

There is no meaning.

VII. Death

We have an awareness of eternity;
But in such a way that we can't fully comprehend.
Everything that happens was decided long ago.
Life is short and meaningless, and it fades away...
... like a shadow.

Humans and animals share the same fate.
Just as one dies, so does the other.

Who knows what is best for us?
Who knows what will happen after we are gone?

Just as no one has power to keep the wind from blowing,
So no one has power over death.

We all go to the same place.
We all come from dust,

And we all return to dust.

I considered the dead happier, because they were already dead,
Than the living, who must still live their lives;
But happier than either of them is the one who has not yet been born,
Because they have not yet seen the evil that is done under the sun.

VIII. Companionship

Some people are utterly alone.

For whom am I working so hard and denying myself pleasure?

A person without a companion works endlessly but never has enough wealth.
But, if two people sleep together, they keep each other warm.
If one of them falls, the other will help their partner up.
Two are better than one.
And a three-stranded cord is not easily broken.

IX. Better Wisdom

I turned myself and my thoughts to seek and know better wisdom,
And the reasons behind things.

Day and night I went without sleep,
Trying to understand this world,
But wisdom remained far away from me.

I realized that no one can really understand everything under the sun.

Existence is vast and deep.

X. Conclusion

I concluded,

We can do nothing better than eat, drink and enjoy the good that results
from all our work, for all the days of our life;
For this is our allotted portion.

If you keep watching the wind, you will never sow;
If you keep looking at the clouds, you will never reap.

Sow your seed in the morning and in the evening,
For you don't know which sowing will succeed,
Maybe even both.
Then the light will be sweet,
and it will be a pleasure to see the sun.

Nothing is more beautiful than the morning sun.
Even if you live to an old age, you should try to enjoy each day,
Because darkness will come and it will last a long time.

Be cheerful and enjoy life while you are young!
Follow your heart's inclinations.
Remove anxiety from your heart, and banish pain,
because youth and the dawn of life are pointless too!

Life is short.

Love who you love, and enjoy being with them.
This is what you are supposed to do as you struggle through life on this
earth.

Work hard at whatever you do.

You will soon be dead,
where no one works or loves or thinks or reasons or knows anything.

Anything can happen to any of us,
And so we never know if life will be good or bad;
But exactly the same thing will finally happen to all of us.

As long as we are alive, there is hope.

The living know that they will die,
But the dead know nothing;
Their loves, their hates, and their jealous feelings have all disappeared with
them.

So go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a happy heart,
For we do not know when our time will come.

And if we live many years,
Let us take joy in every one;
Before the evil days come,
Before the sun and the moon and the stars grow dim,
Before the clouds return,
When the doors to the streets are kept shut,
When the noise from the grain-mill fades,
When the singing of the birds is hard to hear,
When we are afraid to climb a hill,
And terrors stalk the way;
Before the silver cord is snapped,
The bowl of gold is cracked,
The pitcher is shattered at the spring,
The pulley is broken at the cistern,
The dust returns to earth;

As it was;
And the spirit returns to from where it came!

(takes a deep breath)

Pointless!
Pointless!
Utterly meaningless!

And yet...

Credits:

Composed by **John O'Brien**

Performed by **Derbhle Crotty** and the **Carducci String Quartet: Matthew Denton (Violin), Michelle Fleming (Violin), Eoin Schmidt-Martin (Viola), Emma Denton (Cello)**

For Cork Midsummer Festival: **Lorraine Maye, Allyson O'Sullivan, Rose Anne Kidney, Aidan Wallace, Conall Ó'Riain, Susan Holland, Naomi Daly**

Triskel Technical Staff: **Kevin Terry, Robert Habi**

Sound and Archive Recording: **Daragh Murphy**

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