

A PLACE CALLED HOME
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Musical plan (c) Bradley Ellingboe 2022

Part I - CONJURING EDEN

I. Instrumental Overture (using themes from the piece as a whole)

II. **Poplar Street**
(Lively! Chorus + 4 soloists & orchestra)

On Poplar Street, where I grew up,
There were just six houses on either side.
A small street, yes, but just enough;
For a kid like me, it was a universe.

I remember them all, the denizens of Poplar Street:
A dozen homes, one big family.
We laughed, we feuded, we borrowed, we bent;
The American Dream, from many, one.

Mr. Larkin mowed his perfect lawn three times each week. My big sister joked that she hoped to find someone who would love her as much as Mr. Larkin loved his lawn!

The Pulaskis' dog barked every time anyone passed by their house. When the dog died, they got another dog who barked even more!

The Wishers, and the Feinemanns, I remember them all.

*The Jacksons on the corner gave out the best candy at Halloween,
you know, the full-size candy bars!*

Mrs. Locatelli would sing to her tomato plants. Whatever she did seemed to work, because when we would sneak over and pick the ripest ones when she wasn't looking, they were so good!

The Yoshidas, the Winsteads, the Turners, I remember them all.

*The O'Briens' house was painted the color of fresh butter.
Meggy O'Brien lived in that house, the girl I was going to marry one day.*

My best friend Ben lived next door to us. When the eldest of the Baxter boys went off to fight in the war, we were all so proud. He never came home.

Poplar Street was a simple brick lane;
But to us, her kids, she was so much more:
Fenway Park and Carnegie Hall,
Sherwood Forest and the O.K. Corral.

Years have passed since those carefree days.
The families are all different now;
But the houses of Poplar Street still remain.
“Good bones,” my old man used to say.

III.

The Old Oak Tree
(Full chorus & violin)

The old oak tree in the center of town
Rustles his leaves in the summer breezes.
It's a quiet night, a night for wondering;
Only the crickets and frogs by the river
Sing tonight.

The river flows as she always has,
Lazy, and indifferent,
Past the city hall and the courthouse,
Under the bridge and round the old mill
On her way to the sea.

How many summer breezes like this
Have blown through the leaves of the old oak tree?
How many seasons? How many people
Have sat in his shade and played in his leaves
In the golden autumn?

IV.

I Wonder
(Bass solo)

Black smoke rises from the old brick mill, as it's done for a hundred years.
The steam whistle signals the end of the shift, like the slow heartbeat of this blue-collar town.

Forty-four years I gave to this mill; the price of the American Dream, I guess.
Used to be a man could raise a family on his wages from Old Brick; but not any more.
The young folks have all moved up to the city and, honestly, I don't blame them.

Our town ain't what it used to be, that's for sure.
The old city oak I climbed as a child like me is showing his age.
But the old mill keeps on smoking, shift after shift, every single day, excepting Christmas.
It covers the town in the grime of progress, while gilding the pockets of the few.
No one can swim in the river anymore, and more folks get cancer every year, it seems.
Now on the news they talk about global warming, and how factories like ours are to blame.

Makes you wonder, what was it all for?
Could we have done something different?
Made a better life for ourselves, and our children?
I wonder...

V.

Birdsong

(Solo quartet and orchestra)

There was a time when songbirds filled the springtime air
And, looking out upon the greening wood,
I'd often spend a long and lazy afternoon
Just listening...

I could hear the whistling of the meadowlark,
And the wistful calling of the thrush,
A dozen others through the springs and summertimes,
Always singing...

I wandered through these woodlands once upon a time,
My childhood dreams were spent within their song,
A many-layered life force all around me,
All humming...
All magical...

But vacant now the purple martin houses lie;
They stopped returning oh, some years ago.
Perhaps they knew that change would soon be coming,
Incrementally...
With our complicity...

Now, only starlings come to gossip near the wood.
I hear the constant hum of Highway Nine.
We never realize how precious some things are to us,
Until they're gone...

Part II - TEARING IT DOWN

VI. **Instrumental foreshadowing/long intro to “Fire”**
(begin *attacca* from V with harsh chord ff - the music then ebbs and connects directly with VII)

VII. **Fire!**
(Chorus & orchestra)

A blazing summer coils itself
Around this part of the valley,
Its hot breath lulling us
Into lazy days of sleepy stupor.

Many flee to the shade of the woods,
A cool illusion under the canopy;
But it's hotter than ever in living memory,
No respite of rain in sight.

A careless spark becomes a flame;
The hungry flame becomes a fire.
The fire, wild and raging, roars
Until the forest burns!

We and stare at the burning mill,
Like pharaoh's host before the sea;
Our lives, our livelihoods rising up
In a pillar of flame!

So much is lost, so much now barren;
All is ash and cinder.
From every voice a cry of anguish
Mourning our beloved town.

VIII. **What Have We Done?**
(“Turba Chorus”)

What do you do if your house is on fire?
What if you only have moments to leave?
How to decide what to save from the pyre,
With an instant to choose and a lifetime to grieve?

All of our memories, treasures, and dreams,
The rambling collections of entire lives
All gone in an instant, ripped at the seams;
A loss unimaginable to describe.

Who is responsible? Give us a name!
For this was no accident waiting to burn.
Whom do we prosecute? Whom do we blame?
Ignoring for decades, we now wish to learn.

What do we do when our house is on fire,
And the warnings we've heard for so long now sink in?
"Not gonna happen!" we said; "not so dire,"
As we stand in the rubble and take it all in.

Who is responsible, who is to blame,
When all of the signals were perfectly clear?
Shared is the sorrow, and shared is the shame;
The whole earth was screaming, and we chose not to hear.

IX.

My Hometown

(solo)

My hometown was an unassuming place,
Snug between the river and the wood.
Seven generations grew up in its grace,
Built where the First Ones once stood.

My hometown had a history,
For some, a source of pride:
The settlers, the mill, progress, and industry,
But we had shadows to hide.

There was much to love about my hometown,
Whatever its faults or its pain;
But now that the mill has burned it all down,
Can we ever come home again?

My hometown... what future will we see?
We cannot return to the past,
Six generations in the Land of the Free,
Or the seventh will be the last.

Epilogue

X.

The Aftermath

The old oak tree in the center of town
Now stands bare among the ashes,
His branches blackened and brittle
Like a withered hand reaching up
Into a blood-red sky.
The river flows, grey and silent,
Toward an ever warmer sea,
Past the burned-out husks of history
And the still smoking mill, the agent
Of its own demise.

What shall become of this ruin of a town
That smolders now about the old oak tree?
Will other trees in other towns
Wish that we had never come
To build, to bend and, in the end,
To burn?

XI.

A Place Called Home

(Excerptable anthem)

We all have a place we can call our home,
No matter where we wander;
Wherever or how far we roam,
We all have a place called home.

We all have memories that wait for us there,
Where past and present mingle,
Childhood dreams, and those who care;
We all have memories there.

But this home of ours is a fragile place,
And close to the point of peril.
If we cross the shadow, we lose the race;
Our home is a fragile place.

We already know what we must do;
Our path to the future is clear:
We must restore the earth anew.
We know what we must do.

Now is the time to answer the call,
And live another way;
For the work of one can summon all.
Now go, and answer the call!