

voces boreales

PRESENTS

PATH OF MIRACLES

The Immersive Experience

INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF JOBY TALBOT

JUNE 20-24, 2023

OPEN AT 12:00 P.M.

ST. JAMES UNITED CHURCH

463 STE-CATHERINE ST WEST



Conseil
des arts
et des lettres
du Québec

Université 
de Montréal



INNOCEAN

WELCOME

We are so grateful to have you with us today.

Whether you are familiar with the concept of an "Urban Pilgrimage" or the "Compostela" experience or know nothing about it, we hope you will have a delightful time.

Your particular lens will undoubtedly affect your journey, which—we are confident—will move you in ways you may not have expected.

In our hectic lives, such artistry is a welcome respite. Voces Boreales' rendering of Joby Talbot's masterwork was captured through cutting-edge 3D recording technology. This inspired our artisan videographer to birth a world of shapes and colours out of the mathematics of chaos. Not to be outdone, the very walls of St. James were, through beams of light, made to dance along with the music. Masterful music, inspired animation, living architecture—the three strands of a single braid guiding you along your own Camino. May you discover in their careful intertwining the source of a personal and uplifting experience."

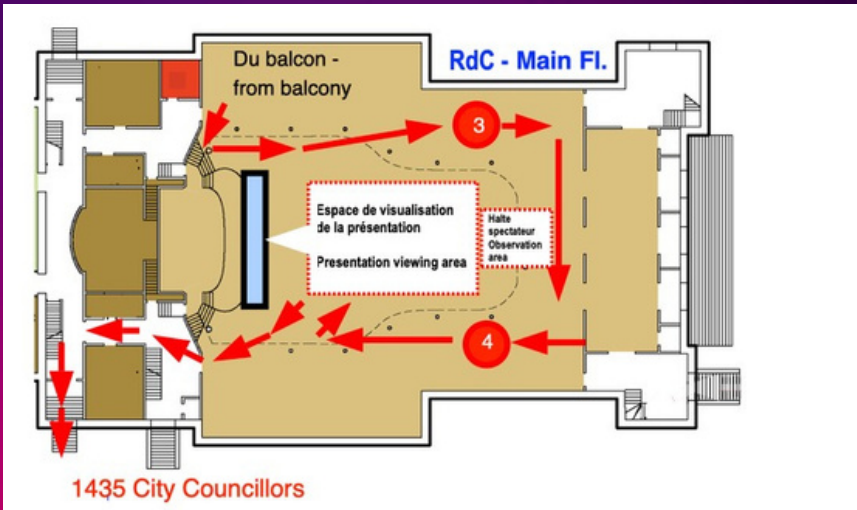
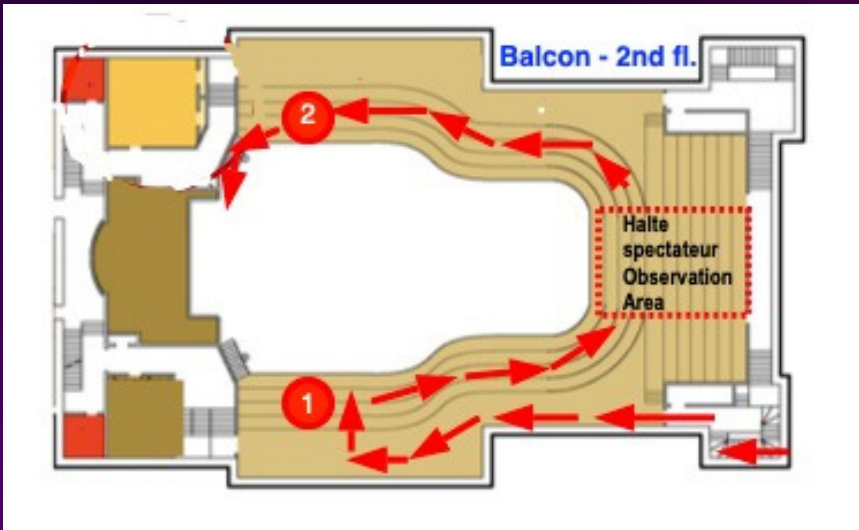
There is a small favour that we ask of you. At the end of this booklet, you will find a QR code pointing to a concise online questionnaire. Once you have completed your journey, please take a few moments to complete it. As this is our first foray into this type of installation, your comments are of great value to us. Thank you in advance.

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Scan to view complete libretto



PROPOSED JOURNEY



This is YOUR Path of Miracles.

As suggested above, we'd like to offer a possible journey through the installation.

Feel free to experience the sound from anywhere in the church.

Listen to specific singers, look around and watch the presentations.

Enjoy!

NOTES FROM THE PODIUM

It isn't often that a new masterpiece comes along for a cappella choir. Only time can tell if a work will be considered a masterpiece, one that will be taken into the repertoire by choirs worldwide and performed by generations hence. We can imagine that Poulenc's *Figure humaine*, Schoenberg's *Friede auf Erden* or Rachmaninoff's *Vespers* might once have been greeted thus.

We might have another such work in Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles*. I can't think of another recently written work for a cappella choir that is so beautifully composed, virtuosic, profound, and thrilling. As a conductor, one of the most important indicators of whether the work merits repeated performance is whether it keeps revealing more and more of itself each time. As a singer, I have performed *Path of Miracles* maybe a dozen times and conducted it at least twenty times; I have spent countless hours in rehearsals studying the score. Thus far, like any great work, it has continued to reveal itself at the musical, structural, academic, historical and emotional levels. As with the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage, the *Path of Miracles* is a journey—a challenge, an inspiration, a transformative experience.

But the birth of a masterpiece isn't always easy, and *Path of Miracles* was no exception. As Talbot researched this masterpiece in Spain, he was involved in a nasty car accident. In the early stages of rehearsal, even Tenebrae's top professional singers struggled with the virtuosity of the score. And then followed the London bombings—the day of the planned premiere on July 7, 2005. But finally, the piece was up and running, and the results were sublime! I had the privilege to perform the work under Nigel Short's direction and be part of its first tour across Northern Spain. I witnessed the rapture of the first audience to hear the piece. I shared moments of such incredible intensity and profound beauty that performers would break down in tears upon leaving the stage.

A few years passed, and I moved to Montreal, bringing a copy of *Path of Miracles*. In 2020, Voces Boreales gave the first complete performance of the piece in Montreal, having previously given others in outlying areas. I must admit that there have been many occasions where the hair stands on the back of my neck. And only a few pieces can do that!

But the final proof of the pudding has to come from the singers themselves—which happens each time they hear of another performance being planned. "Fantastic!" they say. "Another chance to sing this amazing piece!" and, turning to other singers, "Do you know it? You have to hear it." And then, singers say, excitedly, "I'm in. I can't wait!"

I hope that your journey is equally enriching.

E ultreia, e suseia! Andrew Gray

CAMINO OF MIRACLES

“We beat our hands against the walls of heaven and are not heard. Saint James, pray for us.” This is often our own desperate plea—we, modern or medieval life pilgrims—when faced with harsh reality, impassive fate, time constraints, or sheer nonsense. This indeed is what the pilgrims are saying in the second movement of Talbot’s and Dickinson’s Path of Miracles. Notwithstanding the flavour of medieval superstition (we, too, have our superstitions decked in modern clothing), the modern human being is revealed in that statement—the human being who doubts, who searches, who wonders, who hesitates, who walks.

Throughout Path of Miracles, listeners accompany pilgrims along the camino francés—the “Way of the Franks.” This path connects Roncesvalles, along the France–Spain border, with Santiago de Compostela on the northwest coast of the Iberian Peninsula. The four movements of the work—“Roncesvalles,” “Burgos,” “León,” and “Santiago”—serve as steps and markers along our route.

Roncesvalles. The legend of Saint James is what, to start with, moves our pilgrims to embark on this taxing journey. Nighttime. Inspired by the Pasibutbut technique from the Bunun tribe in Taiwan, ascending glissandos are heard among the basses and tenors: from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in the Pyrenees, we climb the Roncesvalles Pass on France’s border. As we reach the top of the mountain, on the spot where Charlemagne allegedly erected a cross, we are granted a glorious vision of our goal, our desire: “Look over there! Compostela and Saint James 800 kilometres away! Herr Santiago! Grott Sanctiagu!” According to legend, in a dream to Charlemagne, James demanded, “Liberate my tomb from the Moors! Follow the Path of Stars all the way to Galicia—the Milky Way before dawn.” Mystical crotales spread the word, taking us down to Pamplona.

Hailing from each European country and each period, pilgrims speak of the legend of Saint James, each in their own language, from his failed mission in Spain and his return to Jerusalem to his suffering at the hands of Herod. Most importantly, they talk about his body floating in a makeshift boat, sailing “without rudder or sail” along the choppy Mediterranean waves—all this sung one syllable at a time—to the Strait of Gibraltar. In turbulent triads sung by sopranos and passed on to the altos and tenors, the boat faces the wrath of the Atlantic Ocean before sailing into the Arousa River’s calm waters near Iria Flavia’s Roman garrison. Saint James’s body has returned to his spiritual home to the sound of the mystical crotales. Like a spell, a voice from the deep, as if from the land itself, summons Saint James’s body to travel twenty kilometres inland before being buried in the middle of a field.

Many years and centuries have gone by (800 years, by the legend). Then one night witnesses the miracle of the “field of stars,” campus stellæ, or the “Compostela.” Thus, a shower of stars, a handful of shepherds, and a hermit become the key players in discovering the remains. “Herr Santiago! Grott Sanctiagu!” In astonishment and quiet admiration, we have walked into the realm of mystery.

CAMINO OF MIRACLES

Burgos. Though the journey had begun with camaraderie and enthusiasm, austere Burgos, the second leg of our journey, unveils the dark sides of the human soul. “Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal!” complain the sopranos and tenors in a cunning counterpoint that is the basis for this movement’s refrain. Many sources stated that medieval pilgrims were prey to unscrupulous thieves who shamelessly robbed their unsuspecting guests at night. Pilgrims stop under Burgos Cathedral’s *Puerta alta*. The lament from some pilgrims is answered by litanies from all, pleading with the saints whose sanctuaries were encountered along the way. “Saint Julian of Cuenca, Santa Casilda, pray for us.” Mustering courage, these pilgrims share hearsay from wonders attributed to Saint James’s intercession. Among altos and tenors, the pilgrims’ messages crisscross against the backdrop of rhythmic steps heard among the basses. The devil is always near, interrupting the pilgrims’ messages. The music is momentarily dark and threatening before pilgrims head back to the Path with resignation, reciting laments and litanies once more.

León. Accompanied by ostinato patterns in the soprano section, pilgrims cross the majestic Meseta plain between Burgos and León. Day after day, the same landscapes of sunburnt beauty. Castrojeriz, parched stone fortress. Ostinato patterns in altos and tenors. Calzadilla. Thirst. Sahagún. A dusty and windy road. The sun never gives up. And yet... “Here is a miracle. That we are here is a miracle.” That is the miracle of the pilgrimage. The third movement ends with a massive D major chord; the ruthless day has become a fire within, a blessing in each pilgrim’s heart, “a sun that dazzles and does not burn.”

Santiago. The road becomes once again mountainous as pilgrims travel beyond León. The Atlantic waves’ turbulent triads from the first movement here depict the increasingly steep hills. The ascent between Foncebadón and Ponferrada is rough; the height of the journey has been reached. The increasingly lush greenery is a source of murmured praise by the sopranos. Galicia is showing its richness as pilgrims are filled with hope. “Then...” there was a morning—the last morning before climbing the last hill. Monte de Gozo, Mountain of Joy! Could it be? Could St. James be waiting for us, down below? “Herr Santiago! Grott Sanctiagu!” Is this it? Are we there yet? Pilgrims hurriedly and joyfully hurtle down the hill. Birds, flowers, plants, and all of nature are summoned to join in the praise surging from their overflowing hearts. Pilgrims catch their breath as they enter the city and stand before the *Pórtico da gloria*, the entrance to the Santiago Cathedral. Like so many who came before them, the pilgrims pray and sing with ceasing, “Herr Santiago! Grott Sanctiagu!”

Some pilgrims will continue to “Finisterre,” the world’s Western edge, for a few more days. As they walk into the waves naked, they leave their dirty rags behind—as well as their travelling woes, fears, doubts, despair, and even their former selves who had embarked on a journey months earlier. The human being—whether medieval or modern—stepping into the Atlantic Ocean’s salty and lively waters is no longer that former self but rather the pilgrim of joy who, like so many before, has walked “where the walls of heaven are as thin as a curtain, transparent as glass.”

THE ARTISTS

Joby Talbot – Composer

Jean Piché – Visual Artist

Robert Dickinson – Librettist

Pierre Thibaudeau – Artistic Director

Andrew Gray – Music Director

Voces Boreales

Sopranos	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Bronwyn Thies-Thompson	Charlotte Cumberbirch	David Menzies	Clayton Kennedy
Kimberley Lynch	Meagan Zantingh	Ben Duinker	Scott Tresham
Emily Wall	Angèle Trudeau	Haitham Haidar	Thomas Jodoin-Fontaine
Ellen Wieser	William Duffy	Arthur Tanguay-Labrosse	William Kraushaar
Charlotte Corwin Dayna Lamothe	Instrumentalist Ben Duinker - Percussion		David Cronkite

(In alphabetical order)

Alex Burton - Technical Controller

Jérémy Busque - Technical Director

Mélanie Créspin - Scenographer

David Cronkite - Co-concept creator

Prof. Martha de Francisco - Producer (Audio)

Louis Desjarlais - Assistant Lighting Designer

Stratsimir Dimitrov - Sound Engineer

Diane Ellison - Project Manager

Andrew Gray - Musical Artistic Director

Jérémie Martineau - Assistant Videographer

A special thank you!

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Geneviève Dussault - photographs

Sylvain Leblanc and the Association du Québec à Compostelle

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