

How We See Water

Film by Robin Starbuck
Music by Matthew LaRocca

How We See Water

a film by Robin Starbuck

with original score by Matt LaRocca

Commissioned by the Vermont Symphony Orchestra in collaboration with the Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival

Robin Starbuck has been filming in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico for over four years. In Chiapas, the poorest of Mexico's 31 states, the survival of indigenous adults and children is simultaneously fragile and rich with cultural significance. As with most of Starbuck's work, her aim with this project is to produce a film that is largely artistic and lyrical. As Starbuck says, "The film is auto-ethnographical and through it I am seeking to establish a link between ancient Mayan beliefs and my experience of indigenous Chiapan life today." Because these links remain ephemeral the combination of film, animation, and text in *How We See Water* intentionally allows for a poetic and expressive construction of meaning. Starbuck's intent is to capture an essence of place and history rather than delineate these. The text for this film production is derived from fragments of the *Popol Vuh*, (an ancient Mayan sacred text - or *ilb'al*). All of the film's imagery was either shot on location in Mexico or animated in Starbuck's NY studio.

The inspiration for the music lies in the traditions of Mayan music and the vivid imagery of the film. The score is based on the scales, harmonies, and instruments used by early Mayans, but reimagined for a modern orchestra and crafted to accentuate the striking visuals of Chiapas and the juxtaposition of modern and ancient worlds.

K'iche language translations:

Tecum' balam	<i>Great Bird God</i>
<i>kojch'awik kej</i> <i>kojch'awik</i>	speak deer speak
<i>b'alam</i> <i>kumatz</i> <i>b'itzbil</i>	jaguar serpent crow
<i>Kacha' ri Alom</i> <i>Tz'agol</i> and <i>Bitol</i>	<i>Womb of Sky</i> , principle deity <i>Framer and Shaper</i> , creator female and male deities. Often referred to as, <i>She who has Born Children</i> and <i>He Who Has Begotten Sons</i>
<i>Tobil</i> and <i>Kukulcan</i>	<i>Sovereign and Serpent</i> , creator deities
<i>Hun' Hunahpu</i> <i>Aj'bit</i> <i>Chin</i>	<i>He of the Place of Cattail Reeds</i> – founding place of the Mesoamerican civilization, Maize God Deity who made humans of corn <i>Goddess of Corn</i> , councilor to rulers, one who introduces bi-sexuality to the people
Achij <i>K'axlanel</i> <i>Ab'hulneb</i>	Human <i>heartener</i> <i>God of Water</i>
<i>ri b'isonel</i>	we mourn, we are mourners
<i>zaktetob</i>	brightness that leaks through cracks, but there is hope
<i>xa b'it</i> <i>xa tzaq</i> <i>xa utukel ri</i>	merely shaped merely framed merely lone men
Steward of the Caves Mother of Hidden Rivers	<i>Nim Ch'okoj</i> , Keeper of Records Principle deity who has become the guardian of all Mayan gods (both male and female) who escaped to the underground
<i>Tezcatlipoca</i>	<i>Smoking Mirror</i> , god of discord, confusion, and prophecy
fire hearth <i>ja'l</i>	<i>q'ag I or q'ag'al</i> , meaning 'glory' <i>k'asi'k</i> , home, also called <i>q'ag k'asi'k</i> or 'home fire' <i>flowing river</i>
<i>Kukulcan</i>	<i>Feathered Serpent</i> , principle deity, sometimes referred to as <i>salvation in water</i> ; also known as the god <i>Quetzalcoatl</i> in Northern Mexico
<i>Uk'ux Kaj</i> ,	Heart of Sky, principle deity
<i>Iqi B'alam</i> <i>Buluc' chabtan</i>	<i>First Alive</i> , first made creature - sometimes represented by the Jaguar War god, deity of violent change
<i>ri itzel no'jinik bitzbil</i> <i>ky'l ki k'ux, ri itzel k'ak</i>	we will forge songs seated in our hearts, we will return

Conductor Notes:

1. To help coordinate the score with the film, a single headphone with a metronome click will be worn by the conductor. The first two measures shown on the score correspond to the preparatory beats of the click track that will be heard in the conductor's headphones. The visuals and music both begin in the third measure, at 0:08. These two empty measures are not present in instrument parts, but bar numbers between parts and score are coordinated.
2. In addition to measure numbers, there are timecode markings at the bottom of the score that correspond with the video to aid in rehearsal.
3. String bowings at letter A, B, D, J, K, L, M, N are free and full throughout.
4. Dashed slurs for strings indicate a seamless transition to or from a tremolo.
5. Wind and brass starting from niente should be breath attacks.
6. Box notation for oboes and strings should be very free and not in time.
7. All grace notes should begin on the beat.
8. When timpani plays with a cymbal on top of the drum or with a friction mallet (letters A, G and M), the sound should be slow-paced and free in order to create an ethereal sonic effect.

Instrumentation:

2 Oboes
1 Basson

2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in C

Timpani

Strings

Score in C

Commissioned by the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, September 2018

How We See Water

Click track only
8 clicks at ♩ = 60

Pale and ethereal
♩ = 60

1

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

Bassoon

Horn in F 1

Horn in F 2

Trumpet in C 1

Trumpet in C 2

Timpani

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Place suspended cymbal upside down on timpani. Slowly ad-lib pitch changes

p

2 3 4

mp

cresc.

0" 4" 8" 12" 16" 20"

6 **A**

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

mf

normale

mf

p

mf

mf

24" 28" 32" 36"

10

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

9 10 11 12

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

non vib.

non vib.

wide, very slow vibrato

mf

f

f

40" 44" 48" 52"

let pitch gradually fall over beats 3,4

let pitch gradually fall over beats 3,4

mp

mp

wispy

p 3 3

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

13 14 15 16

f *mp*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for measures 13 through 16. It features a woodwind section with two Oboes (Ob. 1 and 2) and one Bassoon (Bsn. 1). The Oboes play a sustained note with a dynamic of *mp* and a performance instruction to 'let pitch gradually fall over beats 3,4'. The Bassoon plays a *p* (piano) triplet of eighth notes, described as 'wispy'. The brass section includes two Horns (Hn. 1 and 2), two Cornets (C Tpt. 1 and 2), and a Trombone (Tbn., not explicitly labeled but present in the staff). The Cornet 1 part has a tremolo effect and a dynamic of *mp*. The percussion section (Timp.) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic of *f* (forte) in measure 13, which then changes to *mp* (mezzo-piano) in measure 14. The string section consists of Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The strings play a sustained, moving line with a dynamic of *f* in measure 14.

56"

1'00"

1'04"

1'08"

gradually speed up and then slow down over three measures with slight cresc. and dec.

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

18

17 18 19 20

ppp

ppp

gradually speed up and then slow down over three measures with slight cresc. and dec.

gradually speed up and then slow down over three measures with slight cresc. and dec.

1'12" 1'16" 1'20" 1'24"

Detailed description: This page of a musical score covers measures 17 to 20. The woodwind section includes Oboe 1 and 2, Bassoon 1, Horns 1 and 2, and Trumpets 1 and 2. The percussion section features a Timpani part with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in measures 17-20. The string section consists of Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The strings play a sustained, moving line with long notes and slurs. The woodwinds have specific melodic lines, with Oboe 1 and 2 starting in measure 18 with a *ppp* dynamic. Performance instructions above the woodwind staves indicate a tempo change: 'gradually speed up and then slow down over three measures with slight cresc. and dec.' for both Oboe 1 and Oboe 2. The score is divided into four measures, with measure numbers 17, 18, 19, and 20 marked above the timpani staff. The page number '6' is in the top left corner, and the measure numbers '18' and '17 18 19 20' are also present. The bottom of the page has time signatures: 1'12", 1'16", 1'20", and 1'24".

22 non vib. **B**

Ob. 1 *mf*

Ob. 2 *mf*

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1 sord. *mp*

Hn. 2 sord. *mp*

CTpt. 1 sord. *mp*

CTpt. 2 sord. *mp*

Timp. 21 22 23 *f*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *mp* *f*

Vla. *mp* *f*

Vc. *f*

Cb. *f*

1'28"

1'32"

1'36"

1'40"

26

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

mf 3

mf

senza sord.

mf

senza sord.

mf

f

f

3

3

3

3

1'44"

1'48"

1'52"

1'56"

30 solo **C** *freely, like bird song*

Ob. 1 *mf* 3 5 9

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II *f mp*

Vla. *f mp*

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *f*

2'00"

2'04"

2'08"

2'12"

Ob. 1 ³⁴ speed up tremolo **D** slow tremolo over two bars

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I ³⁴ slow tremolo speed *mp*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

10 9

f

2'16" 2'20" 2'24" 2'28"

Detailed description: This page of a musical score covers measures 34 to 37. The woodwind section includes Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Bassoon 1, Horn 1, Horn 2, Cor Anglais 1, Cor Anglais 2, and Timpani. The string section includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. Oboe 1 has a complex melodic line with tremolos and slurs, marked with '10' and '9' below the notes. A dynamic marking of *f* is present. A box labeled 'D' indicates a 'slow tremolo over two bars' starting in measure 36. The string section consists of sustained notes with tremolos, marked with *mp*. The bottom of the page shows time signatures: 2'16", 2'20", 2'24", and 2'28".

The musical score is arranged in a vertical system with the following parts from top to bottom: Ob. 1, Ob. 2, Bsn. 1, Hn. 1, Hn. 2, CTpt. 1, CTpt. 2, Timp., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. Measure numbers 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42 are indicated at the top of each measure. The woodwinds (Ob., Bsn., Hn., Cpt.) have rests in measures 38-41. The Bsn. 1 part begins in measure 42 with a 'wispy' dynamic and a piano (*p*) triplet. The CTpt. 1 part has a melodic line starting in measure 40 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The Timp. part has a 'superball' effect starting in measure 42 with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The strings (Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., Cb.) play a sustained melodic line with various dynamics like *mp* and *mf*.

superball, drag for 5
beats in straight line

2'32"

2'36"

2'40"

2'44"

42

Ob. 1

Ob. 2 *wispy*
p 3

Bsn. 1

10 *mp*³ *pp*

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp. *sim.*

42

Vln. I *mf* > *mp*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *mf* > *mp*

Vc. *mf* > *mp*

Cb. *mf* > *mp*

mp < *mf*

mp < *mf*

mf *mp*

mf *mp*

mf *mp*

mf *mp*

add open D string

2'48"

2'52"

2'56"

3'00"

46

Ob. 1 *mf*

Ob. 2 *mf*

Bsn. 1 *mf* *f*

Hn. 1 *f* 3

Hn. 2 *f* senza sord.

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp. *sim.*

Vln. I 46 *mf* 3 *f*

Vln. II *mp* *p*

Vla. *mf* *p*

Vc. *mp* *mf*

Cb.

3'04"

3'08"

3'12"

3'16"

E Flowing
cantabile

Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Hn. 1
Hn. 2
CTpt. 1
CTpt. 2
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

50
f
mf
cantabile
mf
p
mf
p
senza sord.
p
mf
p
f
f
p
p
f
p
mf
p
f
p
mf
cantabile
mf

F

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

mp

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

sul pont.

pp

sul pont.

pp

sul pont.

pp

sul pont.

pp

3'52" 3'56" 4'00" 4'04" 4'08" 4'12" 4'16" 4'20"

66

Ob. 1 *smooth and flowing*
mf

Ob. 2 *smooth and flowing*
mf

Bsn. 1 *smooth and flowing*
f

Hn. 1 *smooth and flowing*
f

Hn. 2 *mf* *f*

CTpt. 1 *mf* *f*

CTpt. 2 *smooth and flowing*
f

Timp.

Vln. I *f sub pp* *mf*

Vln. II *f sub pp* *mf*

Vla. *f sub pp* *mf*

Vc. *f sub pp* *mf*

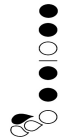
Cb. *mf* *smooth and flowing*
f

4'24"

4'28"

4'32"

4'36"



Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

4'56"

5'00"

5'04"

5'08"

78 **G** Agitated

Ob. 1 *ff* *fff*

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp. *f* ad lib slow circles with superbball mallet

Vln. I *mp* con sord. sul pont. not in time, rest at intervals as desired

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. *mp* con sord. sul pont. not in time, rest at intervals as desired

Cb.

5'12"

5'16"

5'20"

5'24"

82

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

mf

p

ff

flz.

mp

con sord. sul pont.
not in time, rest for intervals as desired

2 3 4 5

2 3 4

2 3

2 3 4 5

2 3 4 5

mf

mf

86

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

6 7 8 9

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

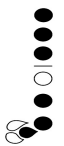
ff

f

mf

p

flz.



90

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

grow and add flz.

f

p

f

ff

ff

ff

10

11

12

13

mf

6

7

8

5

6

7

3

4

5

4

5

6

6'00"

6'04"

6'08"

6'12"

H

Calm and gentle

94

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

14 15

94

senza sord.
flautando, non vib. III

p

senza sord.
flautando, non vib.

p

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

98

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

98

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

senza sord.
flautando, non vib.

p

II

p

senza sord.
flautando, non vib.

102

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

102

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

6'48"

6'52"

6'56"

7'00"



I

106

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p

mf

cresc.

f

mp

f

Solo

normale, expressive

7'04" 7'08" 7'12" 7'16"

tail off gradually

J Broadly

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

110

110

p

cresc.

p

ppp

Loosen the head
as much as possible,
very soft mallets

7'20"

7'24"

7'28"

7'32"

7'35"

115

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p

pp

mf

mp

f

mp

f

f

f

normale

7'38''

7'41''

7'44''

7'47''

7'50''

120

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

C Tpt. 1

C Tpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

f

mp

f

cresc.

f

f

normale

normale

7'53"

7'56"

7'59"

8'02"

8'05"

K

freely, like bird song

125

f

speed up over triplet

5

10

mp

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.



slowly phase into multiphonic with more air and moving down the reed

mf

f

8'08"

8'12"

8'16"

8'20"

L Full and powerful

129

Ob. 1 *p*

Ob. 2 *p* *mf*

Bsn. 1 *mf*

Hn. 1 *mf*

Hn. 2 *p* *f*

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2 *mf*

Timp. heartbeat *mf* *mf*

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

Cb. *mf*

8'24"

8'28"

8'32"

8'36"

133

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p *f*

mf *mf* *mf*

f cresc. *f cresc.*

5 5 5

3

8'40" 8'44" 8'48" 8'52"

M

137

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

mf

mf

f cresc

f cresc

f cresc

fff

fff

8'56"

9'00"

9'04"

9'08"

141

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Place suspended cymbal upside down on timpani.
Slowly ad-lib pitch changes

Timp.

2 3 4

ppp *mf*

141

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

9'12" 9'16" 9'20" 9'24"

145 **N**

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

5 6 7 8

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

f 3

f 3

f 3

f 3

9'28"

9'32"

9'36"

9'40"

149

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

9 10 11 12 13

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

9'44"

9'48"

9'52"

9'56"

10'00"

154

rit. poco a poco

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

CTpt. 1

CTpt. 2

Timp.

14

15

16

17

18

154

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

niente

niente

niente

niente

niente

10'04"

10'08"

10'12"

10'16"

10'20"