

DARK MISSION

An opera in two acts
(based on actual events)

The Vocal/Piano Score

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Note: MIDI files of the piano score are available online at:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/cdeemer/Poems.htm#midi>

SETTING:

Whitman Mission, Walla Walla Valley in eastern Washington, 1836-1847.

VOCAL RANGES:

Tiloukaikt (Baritone)

Tomahas (Tenor)

Five Crows (Tenor)

Marcus Whitman (Tenor)

Narcissa Whitman (Soprano)

Lorinda Bewley (Soprano)

Medicine Chief (Baritone)

Timothy (Tenor)

Joe Lewis (Bass)

Father Blanchet (Bass)

Cayuse Chorus

Missionary Chorus

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Act One

1/ THE CAYUSE – 1

Cayuse Chorus, Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Five Crows

2/ THE MISSIONARIES – 12

Missionary Chorus, Marcus Whitman, Narcissa Whitman

3/ WHO ARE THESE GHOSTS? – A 26, B 30

Cayuse Chorus, Marcus, Narcissa

4/ TO PLANT A GARDEN – 38

Marcus, Narcissa, Lorinda, Tiloukaikt, Five Crows, Choruses

5/ THE CHILDREN ARE SICK – 50

Tiloukaikt, Medicine Chief, Marcus

6/ NARCISSA'S DREAM – 67

Narcissa

7/ TIMOTHY'S SEARCH – 70

Timothy

8/ A SLEEPLESS NIGHT – 73

Marcus, Narcissa

9/ TIMOTHY'S CONVERSION – 81

Marcus, Timothy, Missionary Chorus

10/ TROUBLE – 89

Joe Lewis, Timothy, Father Blanchet, Marcus, Narcissa, Missionary Chorus

11. / THE CHILDREN ARE SICK AGAIN – 100

Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Joe Lewis

Act Two

12. / A STRANGE FOREBODING – 112

Narcissa, Marcus

13. NOW IS THE TIME – 120

Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Five Crows

14. THE MEDICINE MAN MUST PAY – 134

Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Cayuse Chorus, Narcissa, Marcus, Missionary Chorus, Lorinda, Five Crows

15. A STRANGE COURTSHIP – 150

Lorinda, Five Crows, Missionary Chorus, Tiloukaikt, Tomahas

16. NOT GUILTY! – 164

Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Lorinda

17. MARCUS AND NARCISSA IN HEAVEN – 174

Marcus, Narcissa, Missionary Chorus, Tiloukaikt, Tomahas

18. CODA: DARK MISSION – 184

Tiloukaikt, Tomahas, Cayuse Chorus, Five Crows, Medicine Man

SYNOPSIS

The Cayuse are a strong, proud people living in the Walla Walla Valley (scene 1). Into their homeland come missionaries, led by Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, who establish a mission as a base in their efforts to convert the Cayuse to Christianity (scene 2).

The Cayuse find the strangers to be very strange indeed. Marcus is overwhelmed by the task ahead (scene 3). The missionaries begin by trying to teach the Cayuse how to farm but without much luck. One Cayuse Chief, Five Crows, is especially attracted to the young white woman, Lorinda Bewley (scene 4).

When Cayuse children become sick, a Medicine Man who cannot cure them is banished, as is the tribal custom (banishment or worse). Marcus, also a medical doctor, comes forward and helps the children get well (scene 5). In a dream, Narcissa misses her cultured life in Boston. Their task here is so hard (scene 6).

Chief Timothy is very curious about Christianity, especially since Marcus gives credit to Jesus Christ for his ability to make the Cayuse children well again (scene 7). Narcissa has trouble sleeping. Marcus tries to comfort her (scene 8).

Chief Timothy becomes the first Cayuse to convert to Christianity (scene 9). But Joe Lewis warns the Cayuse that Marcus is a fraud, that the true “white religion” is Catholic, as espoused by priests who have arrived in the area for the first time. Marcus fears that their arrival will make the missionary task even harder (scene 10).

Cayuse children are sick again. This time, Marcus cannot help them. White children recover from this measles epidemic but Cayuse children are dying. Some chiefs want to hold Marcus responsible as a medicine man giving bad medicine (scene 11). [Intermission]

Marcus realizes the Cayuse blame him for the death of Cayuse children. Narcissa tries to comfort him (scene 12). All chiefs but one believe it is time to confront Marcus. Five Crows tries to talk them out of it. He is smitten by Lorinda Bewley and wants to take her as his wife (scene 13).

The chiefs confront Marcus at the mission and murder him, Narcissa and others. Five Crows does not participate but takes Lorinda off with him (scene 14). The chief woos Lorinda, treating her with respect, but fails to win her heart. He finally lets her return to her people. In the meantime, the chiefs are captured and convicted of murdering the missionaries (scene 15).

The Cayuse chiefs defend their innocence by arguing that it was the Cayuse way to make a medicine man pay the consequences of bad medicine. They are hung anyway. The Cayuse wars begin (scene 16).

In heaven, Marcus feels like their mission failed. Narcissa disagrees and comforts him (scene 17). The Cayuse, banished to reservations, seeing their resources depleted as more and more white people settle in the west, maintain their innocence to the end (scene 18). [Curtain]