



Jonathan Dove

Hojoki

(An Account of My Hut)

For Countertenor and Orchestra

Commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and Casa da Música, Porto

These days it seems that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more dramatic. So it is interesting to read the 800-year-old essay by Kamo no Chomei (1153-1216) called *Hojoki* (An account of my hut) and learn that, in the span of less than a decade in Kyoto, this mediaeval monk witnessed the devastation caused by a great fire, a mighty whirlwind, the uprooting and relocation of his city, a two-year famine, and finally an earthquake.

Not surprisingly, these events caused the writer to reflect on the impermanence of human dwellings. His own life shows a progressive shedding of living-space, and eventually a retirement from the world to the life of a hermit. I am glad I first encountered his remarkable essay in Donald Keane's elegant and lyrical translation. I have subsequently read other versions, and it would not have occurred to me to set any of them to music. But Keane's has an irresistible poetry and depth, which I hope is still discernible in my considerably abridged version.

David Daniels suggested that I write him a dramatic cantata based on a real historical character. I initially considered various eye-witness accounts of historical events – Pepys and Evelyn writing about the Great Fire of London, Pliny the Younger writing about the eruption of Vesuvius, or Seneca on earthquakes – but I wanted a wider range of contrasts than any one of those events would supply. So I was delighted to discover this wonderful text, with its several disasters, suggesting a series of short narratives with dramatic orchestral interludes.

Chomei's progression through distress, finally attaining a mystical serenity in seclusion, offered a musical shape. I have not attempted to write something that *sounds* Japanese, although, in acknowledgement of the source, I have used Japanese modes – pentatonic at the beginning and the end, minor-sounding in between – and there are occasional echoes of koto and shakuhachi.

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