

Out of whose womb came the ice

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Citations:

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Program Notes

Out of whose womb came the ice creates a sonic and visual glimpse of a segment of the *Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition* (1914-17). In August 1914, at the onset of WWI, polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton gathered a crew of 27 men and set sail for the South Atlantic. They were in pursuit of the last unclaimed prize of the Heroic Age of Exploration: to be the first to cross the Antarctic continent by foot. Upon entering the Weddell Sea, they encountered unusually foul weather. Weaving south through the treacherous seas of ice, their ship, the *Endurance*, became trapped only 85 miles from their destination. After months of waiting for the ice to break, the ship was crushed and sank, leaving the crew stranded upon the ice floes without any means of contacting the outside world. In pursuit of survival, Shackleton and his crew endured 22 months traversing ice floes up the Antarctic Peninsula. The final leg included a deadly 800-mile open boat journey in their lifeboat, the *James Caird*, in hopes of reaching South Georgia Island. The crew was rescued on August 30, 1916; everyone survived. Though this expedition failed, it remains one of the most miraculous stories of polar exploration and human survival.

Out of whose womb came looks at the expedition from the time they enter the Weddell Sea (December 1914) to the sinking of the *Endurance* (November 1915). The vocal and orchestra music focuses on the crew's perception of the *Endurance* in relationship to their surroundings. She goes from being simply a ship, to a lifeline and memento that connects them to the world they left behind. Once she sinks, they are truly left alone. The visuals and electronics offer narrative elements drawn directly from documents of the journey: journal entries of the crew and images by expedition's official photographer Frank Hurley.

Original text written by Nina C. Young and David Tinervia

Part 1: Into the Weddell Sea

*"May the Lord help you do your duty and
guide you through all the dangers by land
and sea."*

*"May you see the Works of the Lord and all
His Wonders in the deep."*

December 5, 1914.
Depart-South Georgia Island,
continuing south.
Fair winds and following seas
Soon turn occult tides of salt and
drift.

The Endurance dodges and weaves
A courtly dance,
As ice floe thickens.
More pressure.
More ice.
Surrender, in kind,
With a diminishing pace

Part 2: Trapped in Pack Ice

January 1915.
Position: 75°23'S, 42°14'W
Trapped in pack ice,
She is steadfast, bound,
Illuminated as stone,
Captive to the bed of frost.

Just 85 miles from landfall,
The barometer steadily drops:
29.79...
29.61...
29.48...
29.39...
29.25

But the clock stops for no one,
Even in the frozen deep.
Polar winter approaches.
The half-light fades.
No warmth.
No movement.
Dead calm.

Marooned in darkness.
Swaddled in bitter haze.
Unreality cloaks the horizon:
Drawn up, icebergs hang upended
in the sky,
The aurora lures in ocular splendor,
Deferential to the drones of ice, sea,
and weather.

"It is more than tantalizing, it is
maddening"
The pack-ice crawling at its glacial
pace,
Drawing them not south, but north.

Naught to do but wait in uncertain
delight
For the turbulent, impending dawn
of spring,
Be it harbinger or savior?
The melt shall soon release or
devour.

Part 3: Order to Abandon

October 27, 1915.
Position: 65°05'S, 51°30'W
It is slow to arrive.

"Do you hear that?"
The Endurance, she bowes,
shudders, cries.
The pack presses mercilessly against
her sides.

Her timbers crack,
Her wounds gape.
Ice will not yield,
Nor spring tides subside.

No longer a ship,
But a torn and twisted shell,
Greenheart and Oak and Man,
Gutted, and strewn about the
restless slabs.

The order is given:
Abandon, Take refuge
Upon the very floe
Which dealt her wrecking blows.

Now atop the ice, Shackleton
looms–
Stark black silhouette confronting
endless white.
The key to survival, surrender all
they know.
He tears out the Queen's blessing,
And drops the Bible on the snow.

Part 4: Death Agony

"She's going, boys"
November 21, 1915, 5pm

She rises, suspended, motionless
In agony takes her final bow,
And slips beneath the ice,
Victim of the polar void.

What remains?
Her epitaph – an iridescent pool.
But a moment passes
And that...gone...too.

Now, alone:
28, on a continent of ice –
Sterile purgatory of blinding white.

It is enough to be alive.
Position: 68°38.5'S, 52°28'W
Drifting NNW.

*"Out of whose womb came the ice?
And the hoary frost of Heaven, who hath
gendered it?
The waters are hid as with a stone.
And the face of the deep is frozen."*