



Vogel: Things Fall apart
 Odekhiren Amaize, voice and narration
 Albany Records

Things Fall apart is a new composition by American composer Roger C. Vogel, based on the novel by the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). That title, in turn, was taken from a line in the poem *The Second Coming* by Irish poet William Butler Yeats: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Never was a literary borrowing more apt. For Achebe's novel tells the story of what happens when a tribal culture, securely propped by the pillars of myth and tradition, is rudely supplanted by western concepts of government, religion, and order. Things, indeed, come apart.

Literature tells the history of the mass through the experience of the individual. In this case, the tragic hero of the story is a man named Okonkwo, respected highly among the people of a collection of villages in the lower Niger region named Umuofia. Alongside his admirable qualities, he contains the seed of his own destruction in his temper, displayed early in the story when he commits an unclean act by beating one of his wives during a season sacred to the harvest goddess.

The circle begins to close in on him when Ikemefuna, a young man who has been held as a hostage in Umuofia, is condemned to die by an oracle. Ignoring the advice of a village elder that he desist because Ikemefuna has regarded him as a father, he participates in the ritual killing rather than be thought weak by the others. Later, in a salute to the dead at a village funeral, Okonkwo's gun accidentally explodes, killing a bystander, and he is compelled to go into exile for five years. The circle of fate is complete when Okonkwo rashly strikes and kills a messenger of the white man's court, and then hangs himself to save his people from reprisals.

In bringing the text drawn from Achebe's novel to the concert hall, composer Roger Vogel enjoys the talents of his colleagues who premiered the work on September 6, 2012 at the Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia. They are Angela Jones-Reus, flute; Martha Thomas, piano; and Todd Mueller, percussion. This trio deftly sets a prevailing mood as they support and underscore the moods of the drama: lyrical, foreboding, and insistently moving toward the final tragedy.

The center of attention remains squarely on the baritone vocalist and narrator. He is the Nigerian-american singer Odekhiren Amaize, who coincidentally commissioned this work. I have been impressed with "Ode," as his friends call him, for some time, having heard with pleasure several of his recordings of Russian songs. He has as much presence in the role of prose narrator as he does as a singer, a factor that helps put across a drama that is all the more moving for its understated style.