

“The Divine Guitar”

For guitar trio with spoken* dialogue.

Most people know of the “*Inferno*” by the great Italian poet Dante, but perhaps know less of the other two books that make-up the monumental trilogy called “*The Divine Comedy*”. In this musical picture I have tried to capture some aspects of Dante’s work by highlighting certain scenes. It is not a musical version of this mighty epic but rather a thumbnail sketch at certain points!

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) wrote his *Comedy*, not in Latin, but in colloquial Italian, wanting it to be for the common reader. He took two threads of a story that people knew well – the story of a vision of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and the story of the lover who has to brave the Underworld to find his lost lady – and combined them into a great allegory of the soul’s search for God. Across the river Acheron we go, down the twenty four circles of Hell to the frozen lake; through the centre of the earth and out again. Through the gates of Purgatory we struggle up the mountain to the earthly paradise at its summit and then up and beyond, whirling from sphere to sphere in the singing Heavens.

- **Introduction**

At the gates of Hell and the banks of the river Acheron. Dante compares the souls waiting, to falling leaves in autumn!

- **Charon, the ferryman of Acheron**

This is the ferryman who conveys the dead in his boat across the river to Hades, represented as an old man of squalid aspect with burning eyes. We hear the creaking of the old boat, heavy in the water, and the thump of his oar!

- **Phlegethon, the fiery river**

The scene is one of violence; this is the river of boiling blood in which those souls who were violent against their neighbours are forever plunged in the blood they spilt! In the second part of this movement I have tried to create an underwater, drowning sensation.

- **The descent to the Frozen Lake**

We scramble down the Malbowges (trenches) to the pit at the bottom. Here, beneath the clamour, beneath the monotonous circlings, beneath the fires of Hell, lies the silence and the rigidity and the eternal frozen cold of the lake “Cocytus”! It is perhaps the greatest image in the *Inferno* and I have tried to give a feeling of ice, glass and frozen wind!

- **The Gate and the Island Mountain**

The scene is dawn; rays of sunlight show us a great mountain so steep that we cannot see the top! The Gate of Purgatory opens and a “chant” is heard. The music struggles through many transformations until it ends triumphantly.

- **Introduction to the Ascent and the Song of the Spheres**

Dante speaks of circling lights and harmony! A simple melody ascends through various key changes to its final version, circling in on itself. The movement ends in tranquility.

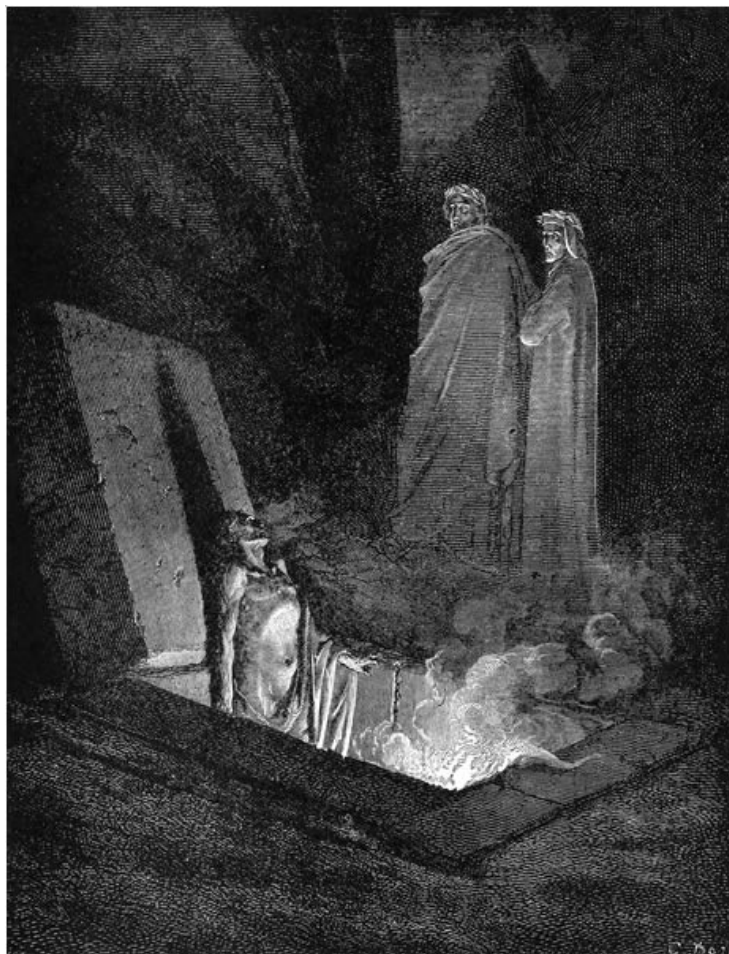
*The work is conceived so that the person playing 3rd guitar performs the “spoken” dialogue. If desired, this can be delivered by another person altogether, such as an actor. The words should be spoken in a strong, clear way, but not overly melodramatic! The piece can also be performed without the commentary by leaving out the Introductions to the various movements. It should, where possible, be spoken in the language of the audience, in keeping with Dante’s original ideals.

Parts for movements 1, 4 & 5 are included in the back of this book, the other sections should be read from the score. Accordingly the owner of this book may make three (3) copies for rehearsal purposes.

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THE DIVINE GUITAR



(From a woodcut by Dore – the Divine Comedy)

**For classical guitar trio with spoken dialogue
(based on episodes from Dante's "Divine Comedy")**

by R. Charlton © 1999

Composed for the Sydney Guitar Trio

Premiere – 1999 Darwin International Guitar Festival

Recorded on the Sydney Guitar Trio CD

“one hour to madness and joy” – New Classical (UK) 465357-2

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