

SNAKE SONGS

Dave Calder



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Lyrics for the open theatre events Snake in the Grass, Raven, and Osiris, created and performed by Triplicate Arts 1980 - 86.

SNAKE'S BIRTH SONG

I was curled round the world
the world was curled round me
I was curled in the roots
of the grey ash tree

I rolled under the stormy thunder
I turned with the turning tide
I was flesh, skin and future
hidden as seed inside

Bringing the dead back with me
I rode earth's windy wheel
on my ice bed of red diamonds
on raw stars cold as steel

In my belly I hide a great light
in my mouth is living fire
I am held within an egg of night
without hatred or desire

Under earth in the core of the fruit
is a place without temptation
the place wherein we are begun
the same place that we end in

Out of the red egg split by the sun
weak as flower, wise as root,
upon the willow I hung
come to fall hard underfoot

All that is born is born without sin
all is born is born without shame
all that is born and struggles to light
is born is born without blame

I slithered down the smooth branches
through long leaves sear and dapple;
on the garden green two figures stood
and one held out ... an apple

SNAKE'S DANCE

Sensuous slither slinkiest slide
the slip in the silence the hiss and glide
steadily sweeping shuddering squirm
quivering question conquering worm

I start sliding this side, certain and sure,
I spiral all scaley, coiling a tower,
twisting and toiling, spellbound by stealth,
I slip through the circle and surprise myself

Head is for seeing, tail is for squeezing,
tongue is for telling and fangs are for seizing,
stretching and spinning I sway to the song,
I go as I must, as I must I go on

Sudden my speed like a wave of the sea,
swift is my sense as wind in tall trees,
strong is as subtle as wise is indeed,
they kneel to no-one who're born without knees

SHADOW PUPPETS

1.

It starts with dropping paper
it ends with nuclear waste
O we'll dump anything anywhere
there's a scrapyard out in space

We're living in a hurry
it's buy sell use and dump;
whole towns in poisoned agony
kids born with armless stumps

The sea's an open sewer
there's poison on the breeze;
the world is turning into waste
more chip-paper than trees

Just dump it round the corner
in some poorer cheaper place:
don't the human race look stupid with
its shit smeared on its face?

2

It starts with robbing sweeties
it ends in taking life;
let's grab whatever we fancy and
try not to pay the price

The boys get cigars and whisky,
the wife swanks in her mink;
it's all the same for Jack the Lad
and Rio Tinto Zinc

This world's a bargain basement
deals in hunger and disease;
we run it on the profits from
the loot of centuries

It fell off the back of a peasant,
we made offers they couldn't refuse,
we've alibis, we close our eyes
to what our hired gangs do

3

It starts out in the playground
it ends on killing fields;
small boys toting toy guns around
learn hates that never heal

Small wars to hold a sheepfarm,
boozy brawls to show your brawn,
old women robbed and beaten up;
all frustration, spite and scorn

The law watch too many cop movies,
politicians crave armies to lead,
the hard the sharp the deadly are
encouraged to succeed

We paid our protection money,
the big boys look after our stuff;
it's understood that we'll be good
even when they play too rough

4

It starts with h.p. payments,
it ends with CIA,
someone's marking you good or bad
and filing you away

Whose security is it?
which law should we thank?
the one that took the t.v. away
or saved Johnson Matthey Bank?

Whose security is it?
what secretly decides?
and keeps its errors to itself
strictly classified?

Security's for the powerful
the rest are for the file;
crunched-up lives and numbers in
a paranoiac pile

5

You can call it economics
but we all know the score;
the old old path to make more cash
is grind it from the poor

The homeless roam the cities
from Huddersfield to Hell,
twenty million refugees
sit in heartbreak hotel

First share's to the bosses,
second's to those they own,
it keeps us in line, Mersey to Tyne,
Shanghai to San Antoine

It's easy in the money
to say no-one needs help;
you'd soon sing a different tune
if you were down and out yourself

BRIDGES

All that is broken the same can be mended,
pots may be different but clay is still clay.
We are the frontiers, the closed gates, the fences,
we can reach over and take them away.

All, we are in all,
there has been no mistake.
What we don't fight against
we help to make

Who's keeping silent outside the doorway?
who has the stick, who straddles the wall?
Look at ourselves, at our weak greed and fury,
what goes for one can happen to all.

All, we are in all,
we are bonded by blood.
We depend on each other
as much as god

Rulers make speeches, armies make wars:
the least thing we do is more important;
Pulling together is how we move forward,
we are the state, is this mess what we want?

All, we are in all,
there is no known cure;
each of us is creating
the others future.

RISING

leaf over cold streets
bird drifting over cornfields
gold shard of sunlight
black scrap blown from the burning

cloud over still pond
moon gleaming on the wet world
shadow of high smoke
slow spinning in the starlight

time-wearied, windblown,
all is, is floating and gone,
from here to beyond the
edge of endless drifting

drawn down to earth or
flying to the horizon,
dance in the sun's eye,
don't fear the fall till

it comes

HELIOKLEPTIC

O when I was young and bright
and thought that all I did was right,
half-man, half-child and half afraid,
I marvelled how the world was made
and mad with curiosity
I had to see, I had to see

O when I was bright and young
I set myself to search the sun
to understand and share the light -
magician on the towering height -
but tempted by the slaves of power
I tried to pluck the burning flower

And in my tiniest heart of hearts
I felt the whole world split apart -
a firestorm thundered through my mind,
I sang the pure force, greedy, blind;
war-dogs were barking in my head
"Now make it kill for us," they said

And none of us believe we're cruel
we just can't see the person who'll
suffer most from what we do,
and carelessly we rush to choose:
so in the triumph of desire,
ablaze with pride, I gave them fire

Who finds a marvel finds a god,
a lavish gift, a threshing rod,
endless delight or tomb of lead -
this god whispered, "You are dead"

Flare-up, melt-down, hard rain, fall-out,
drifting slow death shrouds the garden;
behind the money talk and war-shouts
comes the moaning of dry grasses -
no-one will be left to pardon
from the dust and funeral ashes

DRAGON'S TEETH

In the neglected garden the dragon's teeth are sprouting,
through eyeholes of smashed skulls flower the killers of the future
who are born in waste and anger to blossom in bright shell-bursts
in the rubble of crushed cities

O don't ask who began this - someone pushed and was pushed back
and lies and fears, old grudges, made mad hates grow thick and fast;
and for some it makes more money and for some it makes more power -
their poison's poured on hearts and minds, we're fuel for their bonfire.

Dragon's teeth grow dragon men
breathing fire to burn the world
Dragon tail sweeps like a scythe
as it feeds on hate and fear
as it stamps on hope and life

In the dark of the tunnels the poor people are singing
in praise of the good earth, in fear of its failing;
while with crosses and banners the rich and the powerful
stand so proud in the boneyard feeding death to the dragon

Dragon thinks only of dragon,
dragons don't know when to stop,
it's so easy to be cruel.
If you start him on your pet hates
in the end he'll eat you too

In the tunnels, candles flicker on the dead who line the walls
"Is the war over?" they whisper, "is the garden feeding all?"
Hot winds blow through their sockets from the gold mouth of the dragon:
all, all in the mouth of the dragon bright as ten thousand suns.

SPRING

all our lives are twisted ribbons
tangled in the may-tree's shadow
woven in the hope that
plenty will come

as the new life breaks the waters
as the dark root finds its longing
what we make now is the future
and all of us want to grow
but where to we don't really know

feel the sap flow through your body
lift your heart's wings in the dancing
turn your face up to the sunshine
and fly

o, how we long to go upward
thin windblown stalks in the sunshine
o, how we dance for the makers
but have we roots strong enough to hold us
earthborn to earth as we rise?

all our lives are twisted ribbons
as the new life breaks the waters
feel the sap flow through your body
o how long
to go up
to the sun

FIRE SONG

Dark and still are the sleepers in earth
freed from the sun and the thunder
but we squirm from night to feed on light,
to explore, to make, to wonder.

To chase the clouds down the great highway,
to cast the bright bronze dolls,
to sing the mewling surge of birth
and learn from hollowed skulls.

Round and round we tread the ground,
not knowing where it leads,
the blacksmith turns to armourer,
enjoyment turns to greed.

The young men danced to the edge of the cliff,
they limped as they danced to the sun:
whose cunning gave them eagles' wings?
who knows where they have flown?

In the heel the arrow poisoned by power
as the face flames, burnt by desire,
in the heart of the maze its maker howls
in bull-mask and bonfire.

Haughty their wings, deceitful our dance,
see how greed leads on to violence!
Blazing sun-kings fall from the sky -
a comet, a bird, a silence.

SNAKE REBORN

notes of the same key respond to each other,
fire rises to dry, water flows down to damp,
clouds follow the dragon, winds follow the tiger,
when the limit is reached only change will succeed.

in the burnt-out forests, in the foul fall of rain,
between slow scorching waste and earth-searing bombs,
in the ash of despair, in the burnt-out lives,
at time's edge as always at the edge of the fire

we are examined by future and past -
what we knew, what we learnt, what we left;
what will rise from the fire, from the ash of our lives?
will we light straighter ways or raise hell?

Raven/ RING O' ROSES

We'd like a simple country;
the bankers all agreed;
where the earth owes us the moon
the flowers pay interest on seed
& we've counted the leaves on each tree.

I want a simple country;
the general ordered his troops;
we need more guns to keep the peace
so make the schoolkids into recruits
& shoot those who disagree.

We'd like a simple country;
the bureaucrats whispered together;
where in a maze of whispering corridors
the problems get passed forever
& the redtape wraps all you see.

I'd like a simple country;
was the politician's ringing call;
where my friends and I, in secret decide
what's good for you all
& no-one has a vote.but me.

& we'd all like a simple country,
we'd all like that a lot,
but with men who live for power and greed
who live for what they don't really need,
what chance have we got?

Raven / SONG OF THE SIX

Our pet is hungry, we must feed it.
Throat of darkness, light devourer.

I bring the bright flame of life, blown out
by the thin wind of a bullet

I bring the sour gleam of coins, in shadows,
well greased by sticky fingers

I bring the pallor of neon, furtive flicker
on false papers in locked cellars

I bring the glare of raw sun, carving flesh
off my swollen starved debtors

I bring softsoap-box smiles, teeth glinting
like long knives in the darkness

What will it eat when there is no more light?
What shall we do when there is no more light?

Raven/ BALLAD OF THE BUREAUCRAT

I wasn't born a bureaucrat
wrapped in the civil list,
once I wanted to make a better world
not just the office typist

but mum said get a steady job
with the fully-indexed pension,
push paper round for forty years
on a disconnected extension.

Now I've got my own place in the bunker
that stops me worrying 'bout the bomb
and I bend to each political wind
whichever end it comes from

for I'm paid to keep things going
and not to bother where,
to keep the powerful in position
and the poor in their despair,

to create rules none can understand
and forms you can't fill in,
bland answers to turn away your wrath,
shredded lives in my litter bin.

Sometimes in the long afternoons
as the tea-trolley rattles by
I file myself in grey tin cabinets
under doubt and fear and cry

but they made me promise by her majesty
to act blind and deaf and dumb,
so if you want my true opinion
you'll have to listen to my bum.

Osiris/THE CAPTAINS AND COMMUTERS DEPART

down on the river ships moan in the fog
dark tides are running into the land
out in the backyards hysterical dogs
scream in the cold for a comforting hand

somebody's painted the street signs rasta
somebody's trying to make a break
on higher walls the past is still master
black figures drawn on a white landscape

where the gold headlights slit the fog curtain
- is this all that you want to know?
what can you see when you're thinking of home and
your eyes are glued to your time and the road?

in the confusion somewhere someone's talking:
a voice and another, all over the night;
lovers and fighters, wounded and walking,
mixed in the shadows, the black and the white.

out on the lost ships old slave chains rattle -
what did their drivers choose not to see?
here in the darkness are people not cattle
who want free, who want free, who want free.

Osiris/MOON OVER WATER

don't think this is how it will be always
with self styled gods smashing our lives apart
in their daft feuds, treating us like fools.

And these gods, generals, politicians
they should be ashamed of the mess they've made -
do they really want to be remembered as

as cruel as soulless as destructive as
they are? And maybe we too should feel
sad, a little angry, with ourselves

that we so rarely take them to task
so seldom stand up and tell them that they're
wrong: for when people rise

from within themselves, not pulled by
silver tongues or brazen trumpets, the world
turns in a tide that sweeps away

the years of indifference and indignities
and for a moment, washes clean. No stars
that night. Moon over water. Time for change.



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