

*“There are strange things done
in the midnight sun
by the men who moil for gold ...”
(Robert Service)*

The Egg Musher

Words: Michael Kerstan
Music: Stefan Hakenberg

Characters: Baritone (mayor of Dawson City, Yukon, Canada; egg musher)
Soprano

Music: percussions, flutes, guitar, violin
Duration: ~ 40 minutes

The piece is meant to be produced for a concert podium, i.e., music instruments are part of the setting. Two basic positions for the baritone are required.

I. MAYOR:

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this hot April day in two thousand fifty, under clear blue skies, I have the honor to present to you a memorial to Donald Rasmundsen, a true hero of the Klondike Gold Rush during Chief Isaac's time. His Caucasian frontier spirit and can-do personality are traits that to this day we all celebrate. Rasmundsen risked his life to provide Dawson with a commodity rare and worth its weight in gold during the ice cold winters. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I am talking about eggs from hens, last delivered to our fair city of Dawson by dog-drawn snow sledge one hundred and fifty years ago.

Singer changes position

II. EGG MUSER:

In March 1900, an egg musher from San Francisco is loading his sled at Linderman.

Shipped six thousand eggs from Cisco to Dyea without a loss.

Spent a hundred and fifty bucks on eggs, seventy for the passage.

Up the coast from Bellingham to Saint Rupert the sea was rough.

Met some poor wretches there

struggling to earn a fortune like myself.

Hired eight Tlingits to carry the freight over the steep and slipp'ry Chilkoot Pass.

Cost seven hundred.

This damned blizzard! Sweeping the summit it frosted two of my toes.

Had to leave 'em with a surgeon

for twenty dollars and five eggs.

Bought a decent sled and six fit huskies,
Dog food and snow shoes for four hundred bucks.
Should get it back in Dawson – three times over,
if I'm lucky, even six.

Lookin' forward to one fine future
with my wonderful, wonderful waltzing queen
Lucille.

Linderman good-bye,
then Bennett hello.

Good-bye San Francisco,
bye bye Alma, my dear wife,
pain and misery.

Dawson hello,
Hello Lucille, hello.
Dawson City, hello,
Hello Lucille,

VOICE OF DOGS:

Lucille!

MUSER:

Hello, hello.

Racin' down Lakes Tagish and Marsh,
Past Squaw, White Horse, Rink, and Five Finger Rapids.
Past Teslin, Hootalinqua
Mushing my dogs at ease.

Hello Dawson,
Dawson City, here I come!
Dear Lucille, I'll join you soon.
Lovely baby, hello.

VOICE OF DOGS:

Baby!

MUSER:

Hello sweet angel, hello.

VOICE OF DOGS:

Angel!

MUSER and VOICE OF DOGS (*together*):

Angel. angel. angel!

Singer changes position.

III. MAYOR:

Having become rich, lazy, and round, our Caucasian-Canadian ancestors wanted to hold on to the foods of their forebearers, eat'n' Continental cookin' with breakfast eggs both boiled and scrambled, omelets stuffed with cheese, onions, sausages, and fat from pigs ...

Only one problem. No chickens.

That was the hour of our hero...

IV. MUSER:

(moon, stars, and Northern lights)

Action: Musher taking egg cases for a seat sometimes switching one for another

Heading for Laberge.

Five hundred long miles to Dawson,

Pushin' forward in the dark,

Sleepin' some by day.

Attracted by the winter lights,

Guided by the North Star,

My marvelous dogs know the way.

We maintain a healthy distance
for: a man might as soon put a hand in a boiler
as bend to pet a husky.

I sit on these egg cases to keep them from freezing.
But they also need to stay cool enough
so the chickens won't hatch.

Fragile cargo!

O moonlit river,
heavenly path,
eternal dust covering silent spruce
Could this journey last forever.

Aurora, open wide my lonely heart,
Let it beat loudly as my breath turns to snowflakes.
Light my road to good luck and happiness,
Calm me and keep me warm
on this wind-swept earthly trail.

Sometimes,
overjoyed,
I just want to take it all in.

V. MAYOR:

In Rasmundson's day, the Yukon stayed frozen and unfit for boats 'till May!
Today, though ice-free all year long, the creek runs too shallow for boat traffic.

Thanks to the prior administration's short-sighted, irresponsible, and corrupt policies, water-rationing has robbed us of simple pleasures and modern convenience.

My administration will give you back the ten-minute shower, the flush toilet, and the year-long lawn. Never again will our traditional steam houses and swimming pools run dry.

VI. MUSER:

(Intro: Dog's song, humming soprano, romantic, beautiful, wild, and free)

One of my dogs hears the call of the wild.
Her cousin is calling, sounds of white fang, ha ha ...

“Wolf or dog, it’s all the same.”

Fuckin' dog!
Abandons the track ...
(whipping)
Have to rig her close ... within reach of my whip ...
(whipping)
The wildness gives 'em strength greater than mine.
Trained dogs just sit and wait for their chow.

(whipping)
And, just my luck,
(whipping)
it's eggs they crave!
(whipping)

VII. MAYOR:

While it took the dog-drawn snow sledge twenty-six days to traverse the eight hundred kilometers from Linderman to Dawson,
now “Air Heli-Shuttle North” could easily deliver an egg that distance in less than one hour.

If but we had an egg.

Sadly, since the bird flu epidemic years ago,
there is no more “sunny side up,” no more “deviled delight,”
No more “Kentucky Fried Chicken” or “Peking duck,”
no more “Christmas goose,”
and no more yellow custard.

Though, in our Museum of Regional Immigration we can see a “one thousand year old egg” next to Donald Rasmundsen's snow sledge.

VIII. MUSER:

(Loneliness, howling wolves)

To the left, snow covered poplar and birch,
To the right, more snow on pine and aspen.
Before me, snow on the solid river,
In my back, snow on frozen eddies.

No human as far as the eye can see,
Not a soul to talk to, nor a talker to abide,
Only moose
And elk bugling at my fate

—

And the Siren's song of howling wolves
Calling my dogs back into nature.

IX. MAYOR:

Dawson is a four-season Northwest tourist destination of the first order. Park Canada's heli-shuttle tours to “Jurassic Yukon,” “Winter Beaufort Whale Watch,” and “Moosehide First Nation Village Historic Monument” teach our many Chinese and subcontinental Indian visitors about our awesome Mesozoic past and First Nation heritage, and provide year-round jobs for many of you. In the south, we have turned Pond Bennett into a beautiful holiday resort where even small children can splash in its shallow pools without danger of drowning.

X. MUSHER:

(changing the bandage on his foot)

In Selkirk, I ran out of food for my dogs.
 fed them some eggs,
 but now I have to bury two.
Still seventy miles to Dawson...
 with my limping dogs.
 And their paws are cracked.
I must push on, must not rest.

Bitter,

biting cold.
Numb,
my foot,

doesn't heal.

Blinded –

my eyes –

blinded

cry in pain.

Barely breathing.

Odem freezes.

In my face

snow slices

skin.

Lungs chilled.

Blinking

eyes

wont

ice shut.

Hacking cough

won't stop.

Senseless

on sled.

Asleep –

(hallucinating, limping-dancing)

Casey's Dance Hall

With Lucille and Klondike Kate

Dancin', kissin', huggin',

Huggin', kissin', dancin'.

Champagne by the bottle,

Tobacco in the pipe ...

A huge beefsteak

hash browns,

beans,

salad,

Dancin', kissin', huggin',
Huggin', kissin', dancin'.

Beer on tap,
And cheese cake for desert.
And cheese cake for desert.
And cheese cake for desert.

(shouting)

Hey, Charlie, another drink!

(Soprano dances as if in the arms of the Musher. She is stomping loudly.)

Another drink!
Another drink!

(Rings a bell)

Drink for all!

XI. MAYOR:

Now –

(turns to percussionist.)

drum roll please –

(Drum roll.)

I shall unveil the monument:

This is another historical moment for our beautiful city.

(Holds the cloth, that is spread over the monument, by a corner in suspenseful anticipation . . . then jerks the cloth from the monument. A huge perfectly shaped egg is seen. Musicians animate the audience to applaud.)

XII. MUSER:

(Dawson.)

Fresh eggs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

fresh eggs
from Californ-ee-o!

Two bucks a piece –
No. –
Two fifty!

Fresh eggs,
Ladies and Gentlemen!
They're goin' fast.

Fresh eggs!
Get'em while supplies last!

Ladies and Gentlemen,
fresh eggs
from Californ-ee-o!

Now three dollars!
Each!

DAWSONIAN (*musician*):

These eggs are rotten!
(*another*):
Yak!

MUSER:

Wait a minute, hold on.

DAWSONIAN (*musician*):

Disgusting!

MUSER:

I don't believe they froze.

DAWSONIAN (*musician*):

This stinks!

(the others together):

Yeah!

MUSER:

Let me see, let me try one.

DAWSONIAN *(musician):*

You quack!

MUSER:

No. It can't be ...

No, no ...

Have mercy!

XIII MAYOR:

This administration's current Yukon Water Line project will soon be a source of evenmore jobs and water for our growing population of climate refugees. Scientists tell us there's still enough water frozen in nearby glaciers for all of us. With its price having gone up twenty seven dollars a liter in the past six months, we're in a lucky position. All year round orbital solar reflectors will provide concentrated energy beams twenty-four seven directly to our ice fields. Yukon Creek will be filled with Mother Nature's own sun-kissed ice and feed the hungry rapids of our heritage. The Yukon will finally be a river again anda model for other stewards of the planet. Whitewater rafting will return, replete with fresh farm fish for my Hän First Nation sisters and brothers – and for tourists, too. The world wide moratorium on burning fossil fuels has rendered our cross-Canada gas line useless – let's make it flow again with a precious natural resource from our Great Land: water for all America. Don't wait! The time to invest is now!

The End