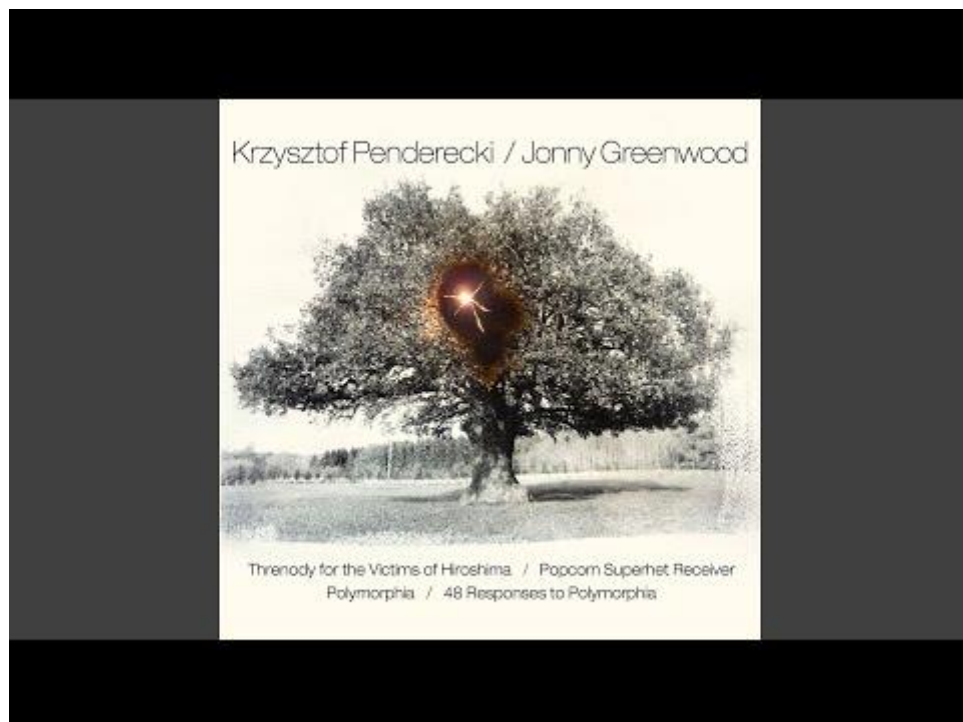


Thomas Berry Manchester

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## A Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima

By Kelvin Ravenscroft ©



*'A Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima'*

*by Krzysztof Penderecki*

**"Despite all the very real as well as fabricated fears, despite the pace of destruction and the fog of distraction, it is still possible to turn back to the wellsprings of life. We can find, in the love that grounds us in the living Earth, clarity, courage and self-respect to free ourselves from bondage to a sick and death-dealing economy."**

Joanna Macy in *'Coming Back to Life-The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects'* (New Society Publishers; 2014) p.xxv



Photograph by Roman Biernacki [www.pexels.com](http://www.pexels.com)

*"Beyond the concept of total war is also the concept of world war. These wars have become so endemic, the instruments of warfare so destructive, and the financial cost of military activities so exhausting that we must wonder how long these conflicts and the threat of such conflicts can endure. They are driven obviously by the deepest of our civilizational pathologies, originating, as so many pathologies, in some distorted sense of the sacred."*

-Thomas Berry in 'The Dream of the Earth'

(Counterpoint; 2015) p.154

The 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August 2025 mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively.

These significant anniversaries can provide a moment in time for a profound encounter of memory and reflection which not only bears witness to the overwhelming loss of life and destruction and to the continuing impact upon the lives of the *hibakusha*, the people who experienced the bombings and survived with life long effects upon their health and wellbeing.

On page 1 of this reflection, the music of the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki entitled '*A Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*' is presented. This work was composed in 1961 and incorporates 52 stringed instruments. It can be regarded as a work which challenges us as we listen to it. The music is discordant, evoking danger, stress, and trauma. Indeed, it can be suggested that Penderecki's *Threnody* is a composition which not only draws our attention to the devastation of eighty years ago but can also awaken in us a reminder that, in many ways, the world of today is facing wide ranging threats: hunger, famine, and starvation, global heating, climate change, extinction of species, deforestation, desertification, drought, floods, wildfires, strife, conflict and war and, increasingly, the prospect of nuclear escalation and the devastation that the use of weapons of mass destruction would bring.

A *Threnody* is a song, music, ode, or poem that is a lament created as a memorial to a dead person, group, or community. It is, therefore, a creative response of the human spirit to the experience of grief and loss.

Complementing the video on the first page of this reflection is a quotation from the eco-philosopher, systems thinker and Buddhist Joanna Macy who passed away on

19<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at the age of 96. Joanna devoted her life to what she termed 'The Work that Reconnects' which is a methodology and a process which aims to transform the experience of despair, alienation, lack of hope, and a sense of being overwhelmed by the sheer scale and magnitude of the challenges which face the Earth today, through collaborative encounter and action.

Joanna's declaration that: "*We can find, in the love that grounds us in the living Earth, clarity, courage and self-respect to free ourselves from bondage to a sick and death-dealing economy*" affirms the capacity of humankind to act upon their most noble instincts and transform despair into hope, darkness into light, and brokenness into integration and a restored wholeness and harmony.

In harmony with thinkers, writers, activists, and creatives from a range of cultural and spiritual traditions, Joanna testifies to the potential for transformation.

Within the Christian tradition, the 6<sup>th</sup> August is the Feast of the Transfiguration which remembers and celebrates what is known as the Transfiguration of Jesus. In the Gospel accounts, Jesus took His disciples Peter, James and John up a mountain whereupon His appearance changed. Luke 9: 29 states that: "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." However one views this event, and however one interprets it, this episode presents the three disciples' encounter with Jesus in which they, literally, see Him 'in a new light'. He is transformed, transfigured, radiating with a vibrant, life affirming, positive luminosity.

I have often reflected upon the juxtaposition of this profound moment of revelation of Jesus to three of His

disciples. The bombing of Hiroshima on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, and the bombing of Nagasaki which shortly followed was a blinding light of death and destruction, whereas the light of Jesus' Transfiguration celebrated on the 6<sup>th</sup> August is a light of life, and hope which transforms the lives of those who experienced it.

As a Buddhist scholar and practitioner, Joanna Macy would have been inspired by the story of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. At his Enlightenment, the Buddha became aware of the transient nature of all phenomena. All things that exist come into being, they grow, develop, mature, and, in the fulness of time, they cease to be. This applies to all that exists, from the smallest phenomena at the microscopic level, to the stars, planets, and galaxies at the macroscopic level. Such a perspective, therefore, testifies to the reality of impermanence, that everything changes, nothing stays the same, all things are in a state of flux, they come into being, mature. and grow and, eventually, will fade away. This reality, which permeates the entire Cosmos and our lives within it, can, at times, appear to be unsettling and destabilising; it can challenge our desire for constancy, stability, and security. However, the existential reality of change can act as a catalyst for positive, creative, transformative endeavours.

In this year in which the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are remembered, it is also, I feel, in order to recognise, affirm, and celebrate another significant event which has taken place in Japan in 2025: the 20<sup>th</sup> World Rose Convention which took place in Fukushima from 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> May.



A collage of various photographs. The top left shows a man in a blue shirt. Next to him are three women in red and black clothing. To the right is a large group of people in school uniforms waving. Below the man in blue is a group of women, some wearing flower crowns. In the center, there's a photo of a person in a red and white costume. The bottom left shows three people in white headbands holding up certificates or gifts. The bottom right shows a person in a red shirt and a group of people with large pink balloons. The text 'Roses for the Future' is written in a white, cursive font across the middle. Below it, a dark red banner contains the text 'A new future begins in Fukuyama' in white. The same text appears again in a white font at the bottom of the collage.

Who are the people, the communities, the networks, who inspire and encourage us to be peacemakers?

Who are the thinkers and visionaries who have inspired us upon our journeys of growth and transformation?

What is the future which we envision and what steps can we take to make such a future a reality?