

# Path of Miracles

by Joby Talbot

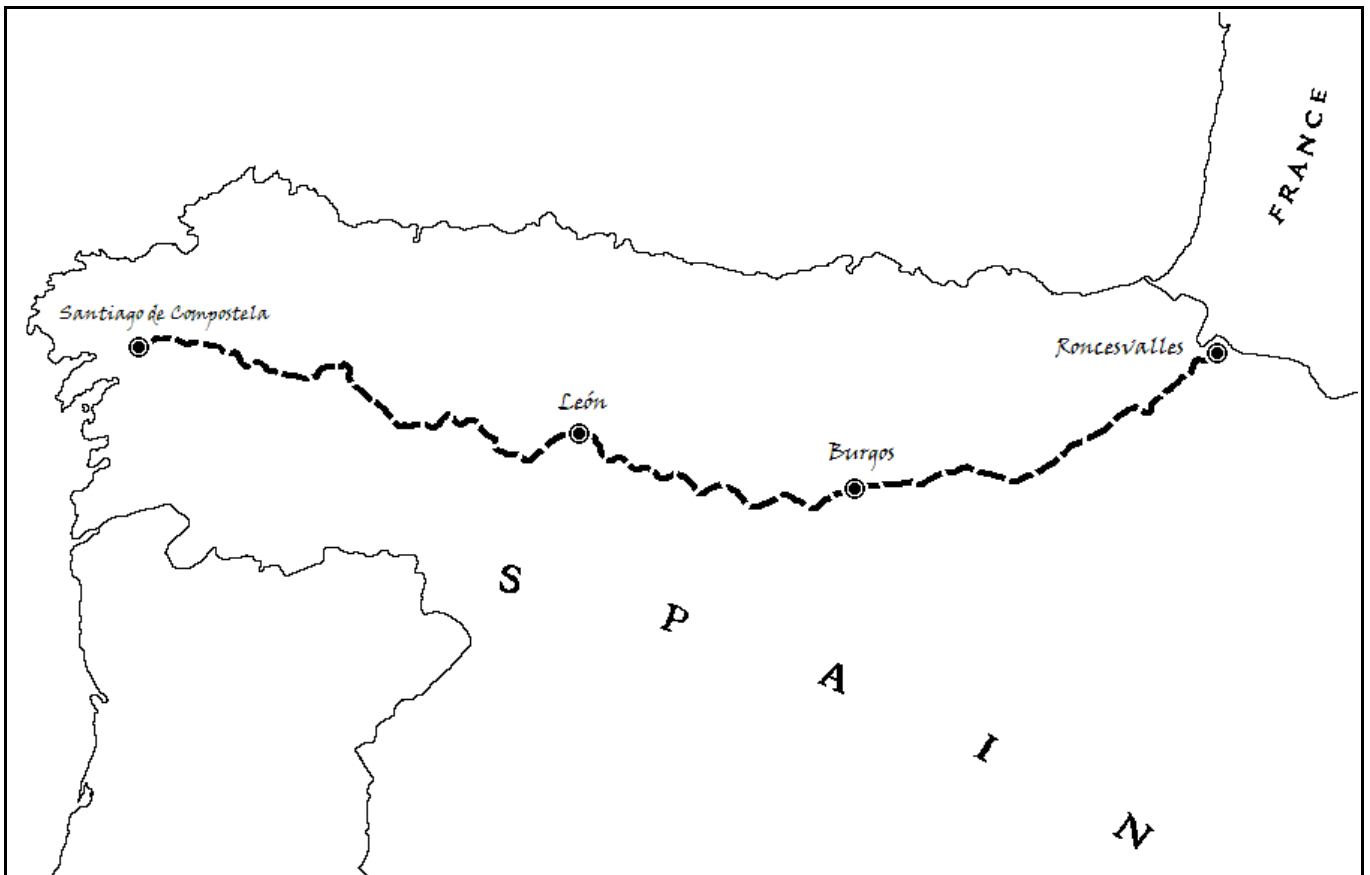
Fusion Vocal Ensemble  
Debra Shearer-Dirié, conductor  
Grace Kruger, crotales

Roncesvalles • Burgos • León • Santiago

(17 mins • 15 mins • 12 mins • 18 mins)

*Please turn off all electronic devices. We also kindly ask that you hold your applause until the end of the performance. Thank you.*

*Fusion thanks the Anglican Parish of St Luke, Toowoomba, and the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane for the use of their beautiful and sacred spaces for these performances. We also thank Somerville House for their generous support throughout 2017.*



# Path of Miracles

Music: Joby Talbot (English, born 1971)

Text: Poetry by Robert Dickinson (English, born 1962), interspersed with passages from the Bible, the 12th-century Codex Calixtinus, and other mediaeval sources

Long before the discovery of the grave of St James in the 9th century, the road through northern Spain between Roncesvalles and Santiago de Compostela (the trail known as the 'Camino Frances') had an ancient past. While it is significant today as a route of Catholic pilgrimage, the generations of travellers who have walked along it have always belonged to a fellowship much broader than the Church. For the pre-Christians, the road followed the path of the Milky Way and led to the 'end of the earth' at Cape Finisterre, for many centuries believed to be the most western point in Europe. Part of the route still follows the sturdy Roman roads used to colonise the Iberian Peninsula. These same roads were used by the Moors in the early 8th century as they moved north from Africa to reach the Bay of Biscay, and again later in the same century as Charlemagne led the push back into Muslim Spain. Today they are visited annually by tens of thousands of tourists, hikers, and seekers from all faiths, or none.

Joby Talbot's stunning *Path of Miracles* traces the pilgrimage history of the road through four movements, each named for one of the staging posts along the Camino trail. *Roncesvalles* begins in the first century when the apostle James, son of Zebedee and brother of John the Apostle, was known to be preaching in Galicia in Spain's northwest. Upon returning to Jerusalem he became the first Christian martyr when his death was ordered by King Herod in the year 44; his remains were secretly returned to Spain and buried by some of the other apostles. Here his bones would lie for eight hundred years until their discovery at Iria Flavia, near Santiago de Compostela, by a shepherd following a star. 'Compostela' is thought to be derived from the Latin *campus stellae*, 'field of stars'.

As well as narrating the beginnings of a tradition, Roncesvalles is also the starting point for our pilgrimage, just as it is the starting point for many of the pilgrims who walk the Camino today. People from all walks of life and language groups gather in the spring each year to begin their journey. The opening chant section of the first movement uses a vocal effect based on the Bunun aboriginal 'Pasiputput' from Taiwan, in which low voices rise in pitch and volume over a long period. The dramatic entry of the higher voices represents the beheading of St James by sword, and here Talbot uses the *Dum Pater Familias*, a 12th century pilgrim's hymn and the most famous of Jacobean chants. This hymn establishes the universality of the cult of St James, interspersing Latin text with a multilingual refrain, and represents the many languages pilgrims will hear on the road as they journey towards the saint's final resting place. A solo alto singing in Greek leads the procession along the trail, followed by other voices singing verses from Acts 12:1-2 in six different languages: Latin, Spanish, Basque, French, English, and German.

In Burgos, we become familiar with the hardships of the pilgrim's journey, particularly the gruelling physical trials of the long walk. While today walkers only need to complete 100km or more to receive an official certificate of pilgrimage, the distance from

Roncesvalles to Santiago is approximately 780km, much of it across difficult terrain and under punishingly hot sun. Talbot uses a trudging motif throughout this movement, interspersed with long pauses as walkers rest their weary feet and bodies. We are also warned – not just of practical dangers such as theft, lynching, or illness – but of spiritual dangers as well: ‘Sometimes the Saint takes the form of a pilgrim, sometimes the devil the form of a saint’. The final chords sung by the basses, motionless and desolate, are taken from Psalm 61: ‘From the end of the earth I cry to you’.

With the journey more than half completed, we reach León, where the interior of the majestic cathedral is bathed in light. A soaring soprano ostinato introduces the third movement of *Path of Miracles*, a repeated affirmation that ‘the sun that shines within me is my joy, and God is my guide’. Like the previous movement, there is a steady walking pulse throughout, but the steps have lost their heaviness. They are replaced with an almost hypnotic and mystical quality, as the pilgrim reflects on the distance that has been traversed, the hardships overcome: ‘That we are here is a miracle’.

Towns whose ‘names are shadows’ pass by as we approach our destination. The road winds and climbs but we keep walking through rain, storms, and snow. This has become the pilgrim’s life, yet there is peace and acceptance as one foot is placed in front of the other. The end will come. Santiago, first glimpsed from the summit of Monte de Gozo, awaits as a promised reward as we begin our ‘longed-for final descent’. Here the music draws us inward and we reflect on our journey of hundreds of kilometres with serenity and quiet majesty. We consider how such a pilgrimage changes us – the person we were before, the person we are now. It is with a final burst of joy that Talbot propels us towards Santiago, setting a mediaeval text on spring from the *Carmina Burana* to a pulsing, rhythmic melody. Yet our journey is not quite over: it is to Finisterre, on the Galician coastline, that we continue. ‘We pray for our sins to fall from us as chains from the limbs of penitents,’ and we cast them into the sea to return to our lives without the things that have been weighing us down. The pilgrim’s hymn returns for a final time, endlessly repeating and disappearing over the horizon.

—Bronwyn Mitchell

Sources: Program notes by Gabriel Crouch for *Tenebrae*, and Eric Leibrock for *Conspirare*

## Joby Talbot

Joby Talbot was born in London in 1971 and studied composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has written extensively for string orchestra and chamber ensemble, as well as music for television, film, and theatre. Most recently he composed the score for the film *Sing* (2016). *Path of Miracles* was written for the professional London-based choir *Tenebrae*, conducted by Nigel Short, and premiered in 2005. Its original premiere date was 7 July, but due to the London terrorist attacks that day, the performance was postponed by several weeks. The work is dedicated to the memory of the composer’s father, Vincent Talbot, who died the same year.

# Texts & Translations

## 1. Roncesvalles

*Herr Santiago  
Grot Sanctiagu  
Eultreya esuseya  
Deius aia nos.*

(Holy St James  
Great St James  
God helps us now  
and evermore.)

Κατ εκεινον δε τον καιρον  
επεβαλεν ηρωδηζ ο βασιλευζ  
ταζ χειραζ κακωσαι τιναζ των  
απο τηζ εκκλησιαζ.  
Ανειλεν δε ιακωβον τον αδελφον  
ιωαννου μαχαιρα.

(James, son of Zebedee,  
brother of John,  
at that time preached  
in Spain and the Western places.  
He was the first  
to preach in Galicia.)

*Eodem autore tempore misit Herodes rex manus ut adfligeret quosdam de ecclesia  
occidit autem Iacobum fratrem Iohannis gladio.*

*En aquel mismo tiempo el rey Herodes echó mano a algunos de la iglesia para  
maltratarles. Y mató a espada a Jacobo, hermano de Juan.*

*Aldi hartan, Herodes erregea eliz elkarteko batzuei gogor erasotzen hasi zen. Santiago,  
Joanen anaia, ezpataz hilarazi zuen.*

*Ver ce temps-là, le roi Hérode se mit à persécuter quelques-un de membres de l'Église. Il  
fit mourir par l'épée Jacques, frère de Jean.*

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

*Um dieselbige Zeit legte der König Herodes die Hände an, etliche von der Gemeinde, sie  
zu peinigen. Er tötete aber Jakobus, den Bruder des Johannes, mit dem Schwert.*

Before this death the Apostle journeyed,  
preaching the word to unbelievers.

Returning, unheeded, to die in Jerusalem — a truth beyond Gospel.

*Jacobus, filius Zebedaei, frate Iohannis,  
Hic Spaniae et occidentalia  
loca praedicat.*

(James, son of Zebedee, brother of John,  
at that time preached in Spain  
and the Western places.)

*Foy el o primeiro que preegou en Galizia.*

(He was the first to preach in Galicia.)

Herod rots on a borrowed throne,  
while the saint is translated to Heaven and Spain,  
the body taken at night from the tomb,  
the stone of the tomb becoming the boat  
that carries him back *ad extremis terrarum*,  
back to the land that denied him in life.

*Huius beatissimi apostoli  
sacra ossa ad Hispanias translata.*

(The sacred bones of the blessed apostle  
taken to Spain.)

*Et depois que o rrey Erodes mãdou  
matar en Iherusalem,  
trouxerõ o corpo del os diçipolos  
por mar a Galiz.*

(After King Herod killed  
him in Jerusalem,  
his disciples took the body  
by sea to Galicia.)

From Jerusalem to Finisterre,  
from the heart of the world to the end of the land  
in a boat made of stone, without rudder or sail.  
Guided by grace to the Galician shore.

*Abandonnant à la Providence  
la soin de la sepulture.*

(Abandoning to Providence  
the care of the tomb.)

*O ajutor omnium seculorum,  
O decus apostollorum,  
O lus clara galicianorum,  
O avocate peregrinorum,  
Jacobe, suplantatur viciorum  
Solve nostrum Cathenes delitorum  
E duc a salutem portum.*

(O judge of all the world,  
O glory of the apostles,  
O clear light of Galicia,  
O defender of pilgrims,  
James, destroyer of sins,  
Deliver us from evil  
and lead us to safe harbour.)

At night on Lebredon by Iria Flavia the hermit Pelayo at prayer and alone  
Saw in the heavens a ring of bright stars shining like beacons over the plain  
And as in Bethlehem the Magi were guided the hermit was led by this holy sign  
For this was the time given to Spain for St James to be found after eight hundred years  
in Compostella, by the field of stars.

*Herr Santiagu  
Grot Sanctiagu  
Eultreya esuseya  
Delius aia nos.*

(Holy St James  
Great St James  
God helps us now  
and evermore.)

## 2. Burgos

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,  
The devil waits at the side of the road.  
We trust in words and remnants, prayers and bones.

We know that the world is a lesson  
As the carved apostles in the Puerta Alta  
Dividing the damned and the saved are a lesson.  
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven.

St Julian of Cuenca,  
Santa Casilda, pray for us.

Remember the pilgrim robbed in Pamplona,  
Cheated of silver the night his wife died;  
Remember the son of the German pilgrim  
Hanged as a thief at the gates of the town,  
Hanged at the word of an innkeeper's daughter.

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,  
The devil waits at the side of the road.  
We trust in words and remnants, prayers and bones.

*Santiago Peregrino:*

His arm is in England, his jaw in Italy,  
And yet he works wonders.  
The widower, the boy on the gallows —  
He did not fail them.

One given a horse on the road by a stranger,  
One kept alive for twenty-six days,  
Unhurt on a gallows for twenty-six days.

His jaw is in Italy, yet he speaks.  
The widower robbed in Pamplona:  
Told by the Saint how the thief  
Fell from the roof of a house to his death.

His arm is in England, yet the boy,  
The pilgrim's son they hanged in Toulouse  
Was borne on the gallows for twenty-six days  
And called to his father: Do not mourn,  
For all this time the Saint has been with me.  
*O beate Jacobe.*

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal.  
We are sick of body, worthy of hell.

The apostles in the Puerta Alta  
Have seen a thousand wonders;  
The stone floor is worn with tears,  
With ecstasies and lamentations.  
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven.

*Santiago Peregrino:*

The devil waits in a turn in the wind  
In a closing door in an empty room.  
A voice at night, a waking dream.  
Traveller, be wary of strangers,  
Sometimes the Saint takes the form of a pilgrim,  
Sometimes the devil the form of a saint.  
Pray to the Saints and the Virgen del Camino,  
To save you as she saved the man from Lyon  
Who was tricked on the road by the deceiver,  
Tricked by the devil in the form of St James  
And who killed himself from fear of hell;

The devil cried out and claimed his soul.  
Weeping, his companions prayed.  
Saint and Virgin heard the prayer  
And turned his wound into a scar,  
From mercy they gave the dead man life.

Innkeepers cheat us, the English steal,  
We are sick of body, worthy of hell.  
We beat our hands against the walls of heaven and are not heard.  
We pray for miracles and are given stories;  
Bread, and are given stones.  
We write our sins on parchment  
To cast upon his shrine in hope they will burn.

We pray to St Julian of Cuenca, to St Amaro the Pilgrim,  
To Santa Casilda, to San Millan and the Virgin of the Road.  
We pray to Santiago.

We know that the world is a lesson  
As the carved apostles in the Puerta Alta  
Dividing the damned and the saved are a lesson.  
We pray the watching saints will help us learn.

*Ora pro nobis, Jacobe,  
A finibus terrae ad te clamavi.*

(Pray for us, James,  
From the end of the earth I cry to you.)

### 3. León

*Li soleus qui en moi luist est mes deduis,  
Et Dieus est mon conduis.*

(The sun that shines within me is my joy,  
and God is my guide.)

We have walked in Jakobsland:  
Over river and sheep track, by hospice and hermit's cave.

We sleep on the earth and dream of the road,  
We wake to the road and we walk.

Wind from the hills, dry as the road,  
Sun overhead, too bright for the eye.

Rumours of grace on the road, of wonders:  
The miracles of Villasirga,  
The Virgin in the apple tree.  
The Apostle on horseback — a journey of days in one night.  
God knows we have walked in Jakobsland:

Through the Gothic Fields, from Castrogeriz to Calzadilla,  
Calzadilla to Sahagun, each day the same road, the same sun.

*Quam dilecta tabernacula tua,  
Dominum virtutem.*

(How admirable are thy tabernacles,  
O Lord of Hosts.)

Here is a miracle.  
That we are here is a miracle.  
Here daylight gives an image of  
The heaven promised by His love.

*Beate, qui habitant in domo tua, Domine;  
In saecula saeculorum laudabant te.*

(Blessed are they that dwell in thy house;  
they will still be praising be.)

We pause, as at the heart of a sun  
That dazzles and does not burn.



## 4. Santiago

The road climbs through changing land.  
Northern rains fall on the deepening green of the slopes of the valley,  
Storms break the summer's heat;  
At Foncebadon a pass can be lost, in one night, to the snow.

The road climbs for days through the highlands of Bierzo,  
To the grassland and rocks of the Valcarce valley.  
White broom and scrub-oak, laburnum and gorse  
Mark the bare hills beside the road.

At O Cebreiro, mountains.  
The road follows the ridgetop  
By meadows of fern, by fields of rye.  
By Fonfria del Camino, by Triacastela.

Towns are shadows the road leaves behind.  
It moves over the slate hills.  
Palas do Rei. Potomarin.  
The names are shadows.

Then, from the stream at Lavacolla to the foot of Monte de Gozo, a morning;  
From the foot of Monte de Gozo to the summit of Monte de Gozo  
The road climbs, before the longed-for final descent to Santiago.

*Herr Santiago*  
*Grot Sanctiagu*  
*Eultreya esuseya*  
*Delius aia nos.*

(Holy St James  
Great St James  
God helps us now  
and evermore.)

*Ver redit optatum, cum gaudio,*  
*Flore decoratum purpureo;*  
*Aves edunt cantus quam dulciter,*  
*Cantus est amoenus totaliter.*

(Longed-for spring returns, with joy,  
adorned with shining flowers. The birds sing  
so sweetly, the woods burst into leaf, there  
is pleasant song on every side.)

*Jacobo dat parium omnis mundus gratis*  
*Ob cuius remedium miles pietatis*  
*Cunctorum presidium est ad vota satis.*

(The whole world freely gives thanks to  
James; through his sacrifice, he, the warrior  
of godliness, is a great defense to all  
through their prayers.)

*O beate Jacobe, virtus nostra vere,*  
*Nobis hostes remove tuos ac tuere*  
*Ac devotos adibe nos tibi placer.*

(O blessed James, truly our strength, take  
our enemies from us and protect your  
people, and cause us, your faithful servants,  
to please you.)

*Jacobo, propicio veniam speramus,  
Et quas ex obsequio merito debemus,  
Patri tam eximio dignes laudes demus.*

(James, let us hope for pardon through your favor, and let us give the worthy praise, which we rightfully owe to so excellent a father.)

At the Western edge of the world  
We pray for our sins to fall from us  
As chains from the limbs of penitents.

We have walked out of the lives we had  
And will return to nothing, if we live,  
Changed by the journey, face and soul alike.

We have walked out of our lives  
To come to where the walls of heaven  
Are thin as a curtain, transparent as glass.

Where the Apostle spoke the holy words,  
Where in death he returned, where God is close,  
Where saints and martyrs mark the road.

Santiago, *primus ex apostolis*,  
Defender of pilgrims, warrior for truth,  
Take from our backs the burdens of this life.

What we have done, who we have been;  
Take them as fire takes the cloth  
They cast into the sea at Finisterre.

Holy St James, great St James  
God help us now and evermore.