

Mass in Exile

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Music by
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Dramaturg
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AVAILABLE EDITIONS

Piano/Vocal Score	9326
Full Score and Parts	RENTAL
Additional Full Score	9326A
<i>Available individually</i>	
V. Mercy	9336

PROGRAM NOTES

In September of 2020, in the tenuous aftermath of lockdown and following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, I found myself appalled by the response to those murders from people I knew from my religious past. I grew up in a closed fundamentalist community, but left them when I came to the conviction that freedom of thought was essential to my becoming an artist. I posted on social media the rarely quoted Psalm 58, which takes rulers to task for subverting justice, then added, “We are the nation the prophets railed against, as we tear babies from their mothers, sterilize female immigrants, prosecute those who give water to refugees, and sanction cold-blooded murder by cop. God help us.” When librettist Leah Lax commented, “Mark, I still hear this as your truest music,” I responded, “Let’s write a mass, Leah! Text by a former Orthodox Jew and music by a former Christian fundamentalist!”

—Mark Buller

I was intrigued. With its rich spiritual themes, a mass seemed just the vehicle. I hoped to express the sense of exile we share, and assert our ownership of those sacred texts long ago implanted in us that still in part define us, to express our mutual struggle toward a new kind of faith within this broken world.

Movement by movement:

For Want of Refuge: Inspired by Matthew 19:14 “Allow the children to come unto me,” and by the thousands of children taken from their parents at the Texas border. The opening movement takes the theme of the *Miserere* of a classic mass—a call for mercy.

Credo in Exile: Classically, the *Credo* section is an assertion of belief. This movement depicts the composer as a child laboring under the weight of those assertions and the attendant demands that surrounded him through his childhood. The boy lies awake at night terrified that he will die in his sleep because of his sins. The chorus is the community in blissfully seductive prayer.

Peaceable Kingdom Gloria: Our *Gloria* is replete with lines from *Song of Songs*. This movement was inspired by its Hebrew translator Chana Bloch, who wrote, “Song of Songs locates the Peaceful Kingdom in human love.”

As Water Flows Away: This movement is based on Psalm 58, which takes rulers to task for misuse of power. Placed at the heart of this mass, it makes reference to the Prayer for the Government in Jewish liturgy since the 14th century. See Jeremiah 29:7: “And seek the welfare of the state in which I have exiled you.”

Mercy: A reframing of a famous quote of ancient Jewish sage Hillel, and a cry for mercy essential to our humanity.

Earth Sanctus: Body and Blood. In a classic mass, the *Sanctus* opens with the “Holy, holy, holy” prayer long shared by Jewish and Christian liturgy, meant as a wakeup call to faith. Instead we ask what is holy, and find holiness in the miracle of clean water and in our ailing earth. In acknowledging our stewardship of a broken world, we are no longer in exile, freeing us to confront the mystery of what is called God.

When All Else Falls Away channels the Benedictus blessing to go in peace that ends the classic mass. With a commitment of “I will follow the question,” the mature spirit finds a path in the broken world. We end on a hope for peace.

— Leah Lax

TEXTS

I. FOR WANT OF REFUGE (*Miserere*)

Mercy! They cry, mercy.
Have mercy! Hear the cry.
They cry from the deep.
Where, oh where is home?

When the children come home,
When they come, only then,
I am home.

II. CREDO IN EXILE

Pray.
Pray, child. Pray.

BARITONE
I tried, but I was a child.

CHORUS
Pray, child.

BARITONE
My God,
You were my Master, Taskmaster

CHORUS
Pray, child.
Lift your eyes and pray.
Pray you won't fall.

BARITONE
My black deepest well.
My God and my Hell.
Your Eyes ever watching—
I stood on the edge.
Oh, my sins...

CHORUS
The Lord God is merciful, full of grace,
Patient, true, and kind.
Forgiving.

BARITONE
They buried me in words without song.
Words they made me love—words without song.
I couldn't see, and always the promise
of indemnity.
Now to find promise
in questions that remain.

CHORUS
God is questions.
God is nothingness.
God is song
without words.

III. PEACEABLE KINGDOM GLORIA

Oh, scent my bed with cinnamon,
Taste the honey, drink the wine.
I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.

My desert olive silver and strong
I drink your sweet oil. I lie in your shade.
Our love is flame and fire, fierce as death.
Hold my hand, my love. I hear your song.
Don't fade, my love—I hear your song.

Oh, scent my bed with cinnamon,
Taste the honey, drink the wine.
I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.
Now arise, arise from the desert, and run away.

IV. AS WATER FLOWS AWAY (*Prayer for the Government*)

Do you think you speak justice? Do you dare to judge?
May your bullets of greed melt may they fall,
as a stolen child who never sees the day.
May you vanish as we vanish,
as water flows away
into the wreck of the world.

V. MERCY

(*Kyrie*)

If I have no mercy, what am I?
Without your mercy, who am I?
If not now, then *ay-mah-tie*?
If not now, then when?

VI. EARTH SANCTUS: BODY AND BLOOD

Kadosh
Kadosh
Kadosh

Holy
Holy
Holy

Water.

Oh, sky of breath, oh holy earth,
Where hides our peace, poor broken earth,
Our earth of life, of love, of breath unfinished. Death.
So holy.
Kadosh.

VII. WHEN ALL ELSE FALLS AWAY (*Benedictus*)

CHORUS
Kadosh. Kadosh.

BARITONE
When world and words fall away,
I will follow the question:
How to find mercy?

CHORUS
When world and words fall away,
I will follow the question:
How to find mercy
Now to find mercy
How to find mercy
In the wreck of this unfinished song.
Holy.

Let peace be without words.
“Let it come
like wildflowers,
suddenly, because the field
must have it: wildpeace.”

—poet Yehudah Amichai

III. Peaceable Kingdom Gloria

Gloria from the *Liber Usualis*

Still quite freely

Piano

5 Sensuously, luxuriant (♩ = 63) *a piacere*

S

A

T

B

Oh, scent my bed with

Oh, scent my bed with

Oh, scent my bed with

Oh, scent my bed with

Sensuously, luxuriant (♩ = 63) *a piacere*

11 *unis.*

S

A

T

B

cin - na - mon.____ Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon.____

cin - na - mon.____ Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon.____

cin - na - mon.____ Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon.____

cin - na - mon.____ Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon.____

16

S Taste the hon - ey, drink the wine. I

A Taste the hon - ey, drink the wine. I

T Taste the hon - ey drink the wine. I am

B Taste the hon - ey drink the wine. I am

mf

mf

mf

unis.

mf

21

S am my be - lov - ed's, I am my be - lov - ed's,

A am my be - lov - ed's, I am my be - lov - ed's,

T my be - lov - ed's, my be - lov - ed's,

B my be - lov - ed's, my be - lov - ed's,

mf

unis.

25

p

S and my be - lov - ed is mine.

p

A and my be - lov - ed is mine.

p

T and my be - lov - ed is mine.

p

B and my be - lov - ed is mine.

mp

p

31 [A] *mp*

S My de - sert ol - ive, sil - ver and strong, my

mp

A My de - sert ol - ive, sil - ver and strong, my

[A]

36 *mf*

S de - sert ol - ive, I drink your sweet oil. I drink your

mf

A de - sert ol - ive, I drink your sweet oil. I drink your

mp

40

S
sweet _____ oil _____ I lie _____ in your shade, I lie in your _____

A
sweet _____ oil _____ I lie _____ in your shade, I lie in your _____

p *unis.* 3

p 3

p

45

S
— shade. Our — love is flame and fire.

A
— shade. Our — love is flame and fire.

T
Our — love is flame and fire.

B
Our — love is flame and fire.

B

for rehearsal only

62

poco rall. C *a tempo*

p

S Don't fade I hear your song.

A Don't fade I hear your song.

T Don't fade I hear your song.

B Don't fade I hear your song.

poco rall. C *a tempo*

Play

pp

68

unis. pp

S Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon. — Oh, scent my

pp

A Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon. — Oh, scent my

unis. pp

T Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon. — Oh, scent my

unis. pp

B Oh, scent my bed with cin - na - mon. — Oh, scent my

84

S *unis. p*
lov - ed's, — and my be - lov-ed — is mine. —

A *unis. p*
lov - ed's, — and my be - lov-ed — is mine. —

T *p*
lov - ed's, — and my be - lov - ed is mine. —

B *unis. p*
lov - ed's, — and my be - lov - ed is mine. —

mp

89

S *D mp*
— Now a - rise, a - rise, from the

A *mp*
— Now a - rise, from the

T *mp*
— Now a - rise, from the

B *mp*
— Now a - rise, from the

D pp

102

rit.

S
way.

A
way.

T
way.

B
way.

rit.
pp

This musical score page, numbered 38, contains measures 102 through 105. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The vocal parts are marked with a 'way.' (wayah) and have long horizontal lines indicating sustained notes. The piano part begins with a fermata in measure 102, followed by a series of chords and arpeggiated figures in measures 103 and 104. In measure 105, the piano part has a melodic line in the right hand marked 'rit.' and 'pp' (pianissimo), while the left hand has a sustained note. The vocal parts also have a melodic line in measure 105, marked 'rit.'.

V. Mercy

Kyrie XVII from the *Liber Usualis*
Quite freely*

3

6 *Molto semplice* (♩ = 63)* *p*

S
A

If — I have, — If — I

mp *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*

10

S
A

have no mer - cy, no

simile

14

S
A

mer - cy, — If — I have, — If — I

T
B

If — I have, — If —

A *mp* *A*

*Begin at measure 6 to omit the optional introduction (Kyrie).

18

S
A

have no mer - cy, no

T
B

I have no mer - cy, no

22

S
A

mer - cy, What am I? What

T
B

mer - cy, What am I? What

26

S
A

am I? With out,

T
B

am I? With - out,

42 **B**

unis. mf

S A

If not _ now, _ If not now, then _ ay - mah -

unis. mf

T B

If not _ now, _ If not now, then _ ay - mah -

B

mf

45

S A

- tie?* If not _ now, _ If not now, then

T B

- tie?* If not _ now, _ If not now, then

cresc.

f

48

S A

f when?

T B

f when?

ff

51

mp *p*

mp *p*

mp *p*

mp *p*

*Pronounced /tai/, rhyming with "why."