Mass in Exile

Libretto by

Music by

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Dramaturg Beth Greenberg

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AVAILABLE EDITIONS

Piano/Vocal Score	9326
Full Score and Parts	RENTAL
Additional Full Score	9326A
Available individu V. Mercy	ally 9336
V. IVICICV	9330



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.

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

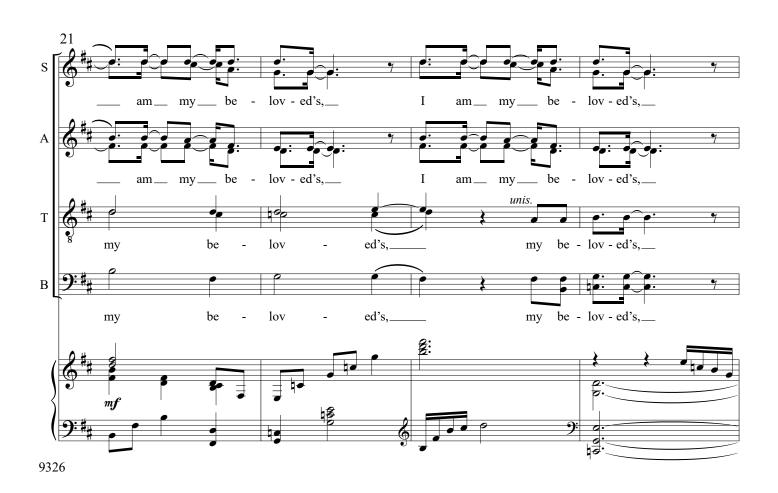
must have it: wildpeace."

—poet Yehudah Amichai

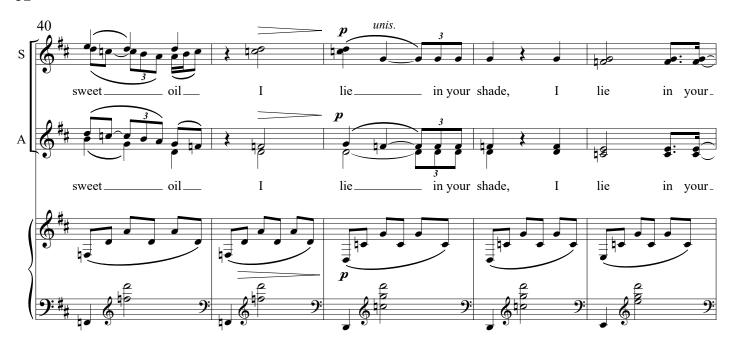
III. Peaceable Kingdom Gloria

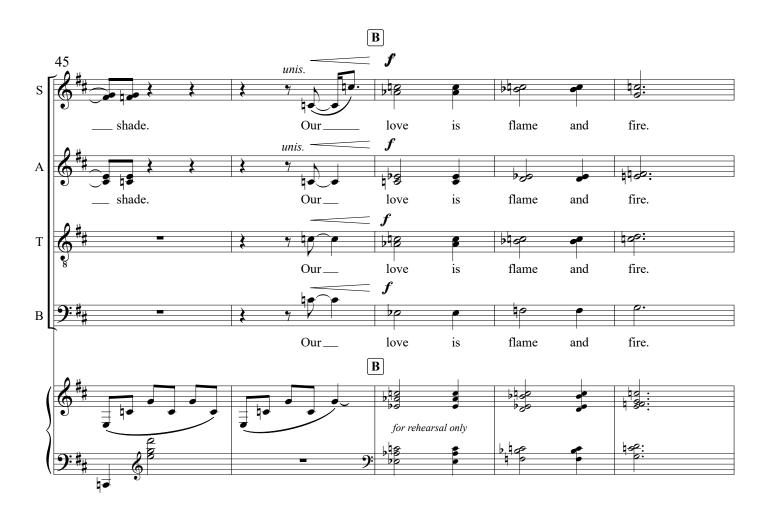






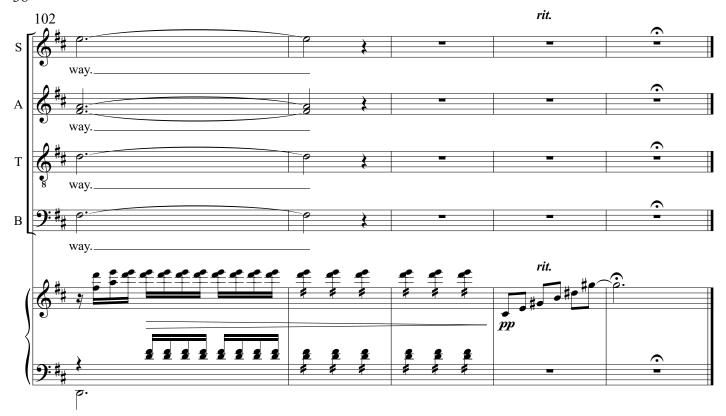














^{*}Begin at measure 6 to omit the optional introduction (Kyrie).





^{*}Pronounced /tai/, rhyming with "why."