

## MASS IN TROUBLED TIMES

### Programme Note

*Mass in Troubled Times* takes its title from Haydn's *Missa in Angustiis* (Hob, XXII/11), composed in 1798 during the Napoleonic Wars and often known as the *Nelson Mass*. No direct connection is intended beyond the shared title, but the present work may be seen as a modern response to Haydn's masterpiece, written against a background of even greater global uncertainty.

The work is a collaboration with the writer Gavin D'Costa, who has devised a complex text, drawing on multiple sources across five languages. Underpinning the entire structure is the Ordinary of the Mass (with added Introit). Only seventeen lines of text from the Mass itself are used. These lines are counterpointed with original poems unfolding a fictional narrative of a refugee father and daughter, fleeing their war-torn country by sea. Alongside these elements are texts in three Middle Eastern languages: a Twitter hashtag in Turkish from 2015 concerning the all-too-real fate of one Syrian refugee child, a passage from the Syriac Orthodox Church Liturgy of the Divine Mysteries and two passages in Arabic from the Qu'ran: the first part of the Shahada (the Muslim profession of faith) and a quotation from the Surah al-Waqi'ah.

The musical setting reflects the diversity of the texts. The Latin text of the Mass is treated in a largely polyphonic style employing a range of imitative devices. The English poems are set simply and directly with a concern for textual clarity (an exception to this occurring in the central *Credo* where the setting is allowed to develop into an extended lyrical episode). The Middle Eastern texts are set in a manner that does not seek to conceal their differences from the Western texts. The (secular) Turkish words are used in a textural manner in the *Introitus* and are complemented by a similar setting of (sacred) Latin words in final *Agnus Dei*. The sacred Syriac and Arabic texts are set in a monodic style.

I am indebted to Dr. John Grimshaw for commissioning the Mass for the BBC Singers and to Sebastian Brock, Argun Çakir and Teresa Witcombe for their invaluable help with the pronunciation and stress-patterns of the Syriac, Turkish and Arabic texts respectively.

**John Pickard**

# Mass in Troubled Times

## I – Introitus

Kıyıya Vuran İnsanlık <sup>1</sup>  
Kıyıya Vuran İnsanlık  
Kıyıya Vuran İnsanlık

Ad te omnis caro veniet <sup>2</sup>

## II – Kyrie

April is the cruellest month:

Sayid <sup>3</sup> pays off the man,  
he holds Ayesha's <sup>4</sup> hand;  
roughly pushed into the boat  
they crouch to stay afloat.

April is the cruellest month:  
Will May ever come?

Her mother's escaped the trouble,  
in Aleppo's choking rubble.  
Her brother was buying sweets,  
when the missile hit their street.

April is the cruellest month.

Moryo raḥeme' layn o' adarayn.  
elfo hwoth maryam. w-ṭe'nath  
w-zayḥath w-yaqar-theh.  
l-haw qoo-bar-nee-ṭo  
moro d-khul-heyn ber-yotho moryo <sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Turkish: 'Humanity washed ashore' - the hashtag used on September 1st, 2015 for Turkish Twitter users, along with a photo of the three year-old Syrian boy named Aylan Kurdi. He drowned during his family's failed attempt at a night crossing from Turkey to Greece. Aylan's five-year-old brother, Galip, and mother, Rehan, also drowned. Their father, Abdullah, survived. There is some controversy regarding the father's 'story' of the events.

<sup>2</sup> Latin: All flesh shall come before you. (from the Roman Catholic Requiem mass)

<sup>3</sup> Arabic: Lord and Master.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic: She who lives; the name of the Prophet's third wife.

<sup>5</sup> Syriac: from the Syriac Orthodox Church Liturgy of the Divine Mysteries:

Lord have mercy upon us and help us.

Mary, like a ship, carried,

adored and honoured

Him, the Helmsman and the Lord

### III – Gloria

Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.  
Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
suscipe deprecationem nostram. <sup>6</sup>

Still falls the Rain:  
Ayesha's sodden breath  
brings warmth upon his face,  
he strokes her matted hair,  
she trembles in his care.

Still falls the Rain:  
drums hard upon his head  
beats deep into her heart.  
Sayid holds her tight  
in this never-ending night.

Still falls the Rain:  
that cares not for us,  
swamps plains, rots grain,  
sings its own song  
carrying us along.

Still falls the Rain:  
giving birth  
to fertile earth.

Et in terra pax  
hominibus bonæ voluntatis. <sup>7</sup>

---

of all creation. [[http://sor.cua.edu/Liturgy/SvcBook/Service\\_Book\\_20080512.pdf](http://sor.cua.edu/Liturgy/SvcBook/Service_Book_20080512.pdf)]

<sup>6</sup> Latin:  
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.  
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.

<sup>7</sup> Latin: And in earth peace  
to men of good will.

#### IV – Credo

Credo in unum Deum  
factorem coeli et terrae,  
visibilium omnium et invisibilium. <sup>8</sup>

la ilaha illa'llah <sup>9</sup>  
la ilaha illa'llah

The sea is calm tonight:  
the waves chorale the tide  
the rhythms break and ride,  
singing a gentler might  
than the darkness of this night.

The sea is calm tonight:  
drowning sleep will quell  
the tears and fears of hell,  
perhaps they will awake  
with sun, the night will break.

The sea is calm tonight:  
be true to one another,  
see flotsam as our brother,  
a stranger as our mother.  
Be still. Behold the Other.

The sea is calm tonight.  
The sea is calm.  
Is calm tonight.

Credo in unum Deum  
la ilaha illa'llah

---

<sup>8</sup> Latin:

I believe in one God  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible.

<sup>9</sup> Arabic:

'There is no god but God' (the first part of the shahada, the Muslim profession of faith); the second part being: 'Muhammadun rasul Allah (Muhammad is the messenger of God); the third, for the Shia, being: wa 'alīyyun walīyyu-llāh (Ali is the wali [friend] of God).

## V – Sanctus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.  
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna in excelsis. <sup>10</sup>

Can we share the grape and grain?  
Can we share this human pain?

Can we eat without our greed?  
Can we drink the love we need?

She is a gift: give first;  
and then receive.

Afara-aytum maa tah'ruthoon  
a-antum tazra-o'onahoo  
am nah'nuz zaari-o'on. <sup>11</sup>

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. <sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Latin:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.

<sup>11</sup> Arabic: Qur'an: Surah al-Waqi'ah 56. 63-64

Have you seen that which you sow? Do you cause it to grow, or are We the grower?

56:63 - أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَّا تَحْرُثُونَ

56:64 - أَلَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الرَّارِعُونَ

<sup>12</sup> Latin: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

## VI – Agnus Dei

Little Lamb who made thee?

Agnus Dei,  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.

Ayesha's bloated body floats  
like a purple coloured boat  
near the shoreline of Palermo

Agnus Dei,  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis.

Little child who loved thee?

Agnus Dei,  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
dona nobis pacem.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Latin:

Lamb of God,  
Who takest away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God,  
Who takest away the sins of the world,  
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God,  
Who takest away the sins of the world,  
grant us peace.