

TEXTS, TRANSLATIONS, AND PROGRAM NOTES

A note from the conductor:

Sometime during my adolescence, I developed a deep fascination with the Requiem mass. Perhaps this can be traced back to my 2014 winter choir concert. I was a freshman in high school; I had never been in a choir before; and there I was singing the Introit and Kyrie from Mozart's *Requiem in D minor*. This choice for a finale didn't scream "holiday spirit," but it was a formative musical experience nonetheless. I quickly became captivated by the apocalyptic imagery vividly conjured up in the "Dies Irae." At times when I was bored in class, I would copy out all 19 stanzas of the sequence by memory. To me, a confirmed-but-largely-non-practicing Catholic, the eschatological existed only in the abstract. My relationship with the Second Coming was nothing if not fetishistic. I found the drama of such a narrative exhilarating, never really bothering to investigate what it all "meant."

All that changed when my dearly beloved friend, Sarah Grube, passed away in the spring of 2024. That cognitive barrier, keeping those liturgies of death and scenes of cataclysm untouched—sterile, even—came crashing down. But for as crushing as those oft-repeated words felt—"grant eternal rest unto them, O Lord"—they were one of my few points of catharsis. I sobbed when Rev. Ian Oliver spoke them at her memorial. When no other prayer would come to mind, as I stood embracing three friends at the wake of someone who I thought would be in my life forever, I recited simply, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Sarah was a woman of faith, and slowly but surely, I found myself reconnecting with mine. I still don't fully understand *what* faith is, but to paraphrase the distant memory of a conversation I once held with my father, I think it's how we make it through life's many trials and tribulations. I think faith is meant to be a part of the human experience—or at least my human experience. This program is an attempt to make linear the constellation of thoughts that infiltrate my mind in the liminal consciousness of a late night. Why am I not showing enough love to the people I love while I have them? Am I spending my time well? How do I make better use of the time I have? What happens to me next? Why am I even here in the first place? (my mother can tell you that I have been asking that last one for the better part of two decades—not always what you expect to come out of a four-year-old's mouth). My personal theology is messy at best—all I can hope is that, as the spiritual says, "we will meet our loved ones there."

The program opens with Moses Hogan's deeply prayerful arrangement of *Abide with Me*. We invoke the presence of a comforter—someone to shelter us through the storm to come. Next, we turn to prophesy—in Yiran Zhao's *The Day of the Lord*, a vision of calamity thunders over the horizon. The disaster that is to befall us seems brutal and inescapable—we are bereft of hope. In this moment of dread and despair, we transition directly to Sarah Blythe Shapiro's *Yet Even Now*. The thesis lies in the title: in the midst of our distress, mercy and love will yet direct us forward. Perhaps more than anything else, it is hope that will carry us through—that otherworldly, "daughter of the ether" that Max Reger extols in *An die Hoffnung*. Finally, in James MacMillan's *Seven Angels*, the heralded judgment arrives, and the world as we know it is reduced to ash. Yet at the end of it all, we find ourselves in a place more welcoming than anything we could have ever before conceived of.

And so, this concert is many things: a love letter, an elegy, a conversation to be had with a therapist. I would not dare claim any kind of "universality" or that my programming speaks to some higher truth. It's just a portrait of where I am right now as I stand "backstage" in that stairwell to the left of the steps thinking about God-knows-what. Maybe some part of it will resonate with you; maybe you'll just think "cool pieces" (and they are!) and go home. Maybe this is all just early-/mid-20s angst; maybe the tutorial portion of my life has drawn to a close and I—like all of my peers—am thinking about what comes next. Time feels more finite than it ever has before, and it's often difficult to turn that anxiety into gratitude for the present moment. I've just never been great with change.

For as scary as some of this music is, it is my earnest desire that this program leave you feeling hopeful. We're living in dark times. Despair seems to be the default. Music is not going to lift us out from the pit we find ourselves in, but perhaps through it, we can glimpse what is on the other side of such upheaval. Let us use well the time that we have here, with

each other. Let us be good and dutiful neighbors to one another. Let us protect the most vulnerable among us. Let us love one another more fully. Perhaps it is by our hand that all things can be made new.

PASSED AWAY MADE NEW

Abide with Me

Text by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and strength can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Born in New Orleans, LA, Moses Hogan (1957-2003) was the foremost arranger of spirituals of the late-20th century and the singular driving force behind the revitalization of the concert spiritual. Raised in a musical family, Hogan was an incredibly gifted young pianist, mentored in part by his uncle Edwin, who taught him “how to balance keyboard skills, compositional facility, and choral conducting” (Newland 2008). After graduating high school, he was awarded a full scholarship to study at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he pursued a BM in piano performance. It was during this time that he studied with the late Joseph Schwartz, to whom his arrangement of Abide with Me is dedicated. One of the 80 choral works Hogan penned in his lifetime, Abide with Me is a prime example of Hogan’s compositional ingenuity. Hogan’s arrangement is highly sensitive, expertly balancing the newness of a vibrant harmonic language with the serenity of the original hymn. Hogan pairs the text down to the essentials, distilling the message of the arrangement into just two stanzas and a coda. The resultant mood is one of deep contemplation—an intimate and highly personal plea. — Alex Whittington

The Day of the Lord

Text: Joel 2:1–4, 6, 10–11 (NRSV-CE)

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

Fire devours in front of them, and behind them a flame burns. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses, and like war-horses they charge. Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

The LORD utters his voice at the head of his army; how vast is his host! Numberless are those who obey his command. Truly the day of the LORD is great; terrible indeed—who can endure it?

Chapter 2 of the book of Joel is full of destruction and anguish. The people anxiously await the day of the Lord. I look at this chapter as a mixture of fear and hope.

The selected verses are set for SATB choir with a solo quartet (from the choir), trumpet in C, solo violin, cello, and percussion. With the goal of conveying the text but still being a cohesive choral composition, the opening section resembles a liturgical anthem that returns a few times throughout the piece. The last phrase of the text selection "who can endure it?" is repeated several times at the endings of sections before, as a question from the people, or to the people, or from us—the reader/listener, as we see the destructions of anguish. [...] — Yiran Zhao

Yet Even Now

Text: Joel 2:12-13 (NRSV-CE)

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

This would be the perfect place to convey my various musical whims and decisions in composing Yet Even Now, but I feel as though it would be far more apt to write about the unbridled pain, the unfettered love, and the raw fuel behind this work.

In April of 2024, one of my best friends, Sarah Grube, tragically passed away at the age of 23. The events immediately following her death are all simultaneously hazy and razor-sharp, utterly etched in my memory, allowing themselves to be replayed with or without invitation. Sarah was only three weeks older than me; I remember reaching the exact age she was when she died and realizing that I would thereafter live more life than Sarah Grube. But I didn't, and I haven't: Sarah lived one of the fullest lives of anyone I have ever met. As my best friend, Alex Whittington, eloquently intimated, "Sarah was in the details." Always present, always willing, always invested. Invested in you. And positively determined to create space for you in her vibrant life. And you really couldn't help yourself, either.

Alex commissioned me to write this piece prior to Sarah's passing. I began composing afterwards, and it was instantly clear to me to whom the piece should be dedicated. In keeping with who Sarah was as a singer, the piece is not without stratospheric ranges, as Sarah was famous for her "high Eb's." The piece can be divided into two parts, one regarding the first four lines of scripture, and the other the last four. The second half of the piece utilizes a melody I composed at age 17, originally set to a poem by rapper Tupac Shakur, entitled The Rose That Grew from Concrete:

*"Did u hear about the rose that grew from a crack
in the concrete*

*Proving nature's law's wrong it learned 2 walk
without having feet*

Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams

It learned 2 breathe fresh air

Long live the rose that grew from concrete

When no one else even cared!"

I believe that Tupac was using this metaphor—the rose—as a commentary on his own life. Pluralistic meanings can be derived from this poem, including an allusion to Jesus as the rose that grew from concrete. Though this is an Old Testament text, my use of this melody, originally set to Tupac’s poem, was my personal nod at a foreshadow to Jesus’s coming in the New Testament. But, to me, there is a third reference to the rose that grew from concrete: Sarah Grube. Sarah was very vocal about her lifelong, intensive battle with mental illness. I imagine that most days felt nearly insurmountable, yet nevertheless she blessed this world with her presence for 23 years. I have used myriad metaphors to describe Sarah: a rose, a star, a bird. These epithets have all been used to describe Jesus as well, as befits the Christ-centric life she led. To quote her writing about the star that appeared to prophesy Jesus’s birth:

“Impossibly bright lights, catastrophic explosions, spawning comets destined to burn. I imagine a Christ-comet hurtling towards the Earth, bringing grace beyond comprehension. I imagine the bright, shining trail illuminated by a meteor splitting from that comet, drawing attention to something extraterrestrial that, when it finally collides with the ground, changes everything.”

And I will leave the rest with you [...] — Sarah Blythe Shapiro

An die Hoffnung

Poem by Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843); Translation © by Sharon Krebs, reprinted with permission from the LiederNet Archive; supplemental translations provided by Alex Whittington

O Hoffnung! holde, gütigeschäftige!
Die du das Haus der Trauernden nicht verschmähst,
Und gerne dienend, Edle! zwischen
Sterblichen waltest und Himmelsmächten,

Wo bist du? wenig lebt' ich; doch atmet kalt
Mein Abend schon. Und stille, den Schatten gleich,
Bin ich schon hier; und schon gesanglos
Schlummert das schauernde Herz im Busen.

Im grünen Tale, dort, wo der frische Quell
Vom Berge täglich rauscht, und die liebliche
Zeitlose mir am Herbsttag aufblüht,
Dort, in der Stille, du Holde, will ich

Dich suchen, oder wenn in der Mitternacht
Das unsichtbare Leben im Haine wallt,
Und über mir die immerfrohen
Blumen, die blühenden Sterne, glänzen,

[O du Holde, dich, ja dich will ich finden]

O du des Äthers Tochter! erscheine dann
Aus deines Vaters Gärten, und darfst du nicht
[mir sterblich Glück verheißen, schreck', o
Schrecke] mit anderem nur das Herz mir.

O hope! lovely, benevolently active one!
You, who does not eschew the house of those who mourn,
And gladly serving, noble one! have your workings
Between mortals and the powers of heaven,

Where are you? I have lived only a little while; but already
My evening breathes coldly. And quietly, like the shadows,
I am already here; and, already songless,
My shuddering heart slumbers in my breast.

In the green valley, yonder, where the fresh water-spring
Rushes down daily from the mountain, and the lovely
Crocus blooms for me on an autumnal day,
There, in the quietness, you lovely one, I shall

Seek you, or when in the midnight hour
Invisible life wanders in the grove,
And above me the ever-joyful
Flowers, the blossoming stars, shine.

[O you lovely one, you, yes you desire I to find]

Oh, you daughter of the aether! appear then
From your father's gardens, and if you are not permitted
[to promise me mortal happiness], startle, oh,
Only startle my heart with other means.

Born in 1873 in Bavaria, Max Reger's brief but prolific life saw the development of a style that epitomized the increasing chromatic saturation of the late 19th century. Most of his body of work is comprised of compositions for organ, piano, and choir, though he would come to write several orchestral works in his later years, including his 1912 composition, An die Hoffnung. This orchestral Lied was written for and dedicated to Anna Erler-Schnaudt (1878–1963): a German alto who developed a friendship with Reger that would transcend even his passing. An die Hoffnung sets a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin, a key figure of German Romanticism. Reger's music works to personify "hope" just as much as Hölderlin's text. The opening of the work is cold and unfeeling—hope has fled, and the singer has resigned themselves to the encroaching shadows. Soon after, the emotion of the text and music transform, as the Pandean visage of hope stirs up vignettes of nature's bounty. Reger illustrates each of these pastoral themes with care, painting roaring rivers and "ever-joyful" flowers. As echoes of the opening return at the end of the work, the mood is transfigured. The singer is assured that they will find hope—or perhaps that hope will find them—and the piece dissolves into still tranquility. — Alex Whittington

Seven Angels

Revelation 8; 9:1, 2b-4, 13-17a; 11:12b, 15-19 (RSV-CE); 21:1-6a (ESV)

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, loud noises, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them.

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the fountains of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the water, because it was made bitter.

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice, as it flew in mid-heaven, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets which the three angels are about to blow!"

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit; and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth; they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads.

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind. The number of the troops of [the] cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. And this was how I saw the horses in my vision.

"Come up hither!"

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,

"We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." [And he also] said, "Write this down, for these words are true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Seven Angels is a setting of passages from the Book of Revelation, with particular reference to the angels who appear with seven trumpet blasts, heralding a series of apocalyptic scenes. The idea of the piece grew out of my conversation with Jeffrey Skidmore, the director of Ex Cathedra, who commissioned the work, and in particular to our shared interest in Elgar. Having written The Apostles and The Kingdom, Elgar had hoped to write a third oratorio based on the Last Judgement. This did not happen, but the idea caught our imagination and provoked me to pursue it in my own way.

There is a vividness and strangeness in these dramatic texts, which are endlessly fascinating and disturbing. The instruments used here are based on the various instrumental types mentioned throughout scripture - trumpets, harp, bells, cymbals, tabor, rebec. These are scored for mostly in their modern forms, but the use of shofars (Jewish ritual temple trumpets) and early trumpets was prompted by my own experience as a trumpeter from a young age and the fascination of these instruments for me.

The choral writing shows a similar contrast between traditional and contemporary scoring: sometimes the voles are used either polyphonically or homophonically, whilst at other times there is a freer approach to pitch along with the use of extended vocal techniques. — James MacMillan

Soprano

Izzy Barbato*
Violet Barnum
Emily Cousins
Ellen Robertson*
Fi Schroth-Douma
Rachel Segman*
Sara Stebbins
Hyunju Yang

Alto

Anya AitSahlia
Eliana Barwinski*
Mahima Kumara
Nicole Lam
Veronica Roan*
Sarah Sparling
Ruthie Weinbaum
Bel Zufferey

Tenor

Matthew Newhouse
Jack Purdue
John Raskopf
Trevor Scott*
Peter Sykes
Kevin Vondrak
Angus Warren
Caspar Wein

Bass

Even Brock
Matthew Cramer
Ava Dadvand
Byron De Leon
Matthew Dexter*
Quinn Evans
Jasper Schoff
Evan Stein

Flute

Jolie Fitch
Rafael Mendez

Oboe

Maren Tonini
Annie Winkelman

Clarinet

Nickolas Hamblin
Diana Yang

Bassoon

Darius Farhoumand
Emma Fuller

Trumpet

Benjamin Ray*
Grace O'Connell*

Horn

Gretchen Berendt
Sam Hart
Lily Judge
Braydon Ross

Violin I

Josh Liu**
Phoebe Liu
Naomi-Jeanne Main

Violin II

Atticus Margulis-Ohnuma
Nate Strothkamp
Dabin Yang

Viola

Ayano Nakamura
Miranda Werner

Cello

Thomas Walter
Charles Zandieh*

Bass

Yuki Nagase
Joshua Rhodes

Percussion

Michael Yeung*

Harp

Sebastian Gobbels*

* denotes soloist

** concertmaster