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WHO SPEAKS FOR THE GODS?

For BARITONE and PIANO

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NOTES ON THE PIECE

The idea for this song cycle is based on a course I took as a student at Millsaps College called *Who Speaks for the God(s)?* with Dr. James E. Bowley. The class dealt with the issue of interpreting ancient religious texts and how different religious extremist groups throughout history have validated their severe social agendas by using these texts according to their own interpretations. In this sort of process, the original message of the text can become quite adulterated or distorted. I’ve attempted to explore these same issues by using the song cycle in a novel way. Specifically, I am focusing on the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC). Each song’s text is composed of passages from the Bible that the WBC has used to legitimize one of their claims. Thus, each song represents one of their infamous picket signs.

The Biblical text is presented in Latin so that the listener cannot readily comprehend the message. This emphasizes the text’s vulnerability to subjective interpretation. In keeping with this concept of misrepresentation and misinterpretation, the “mistakes” in the text setting are actually intentional. At times, the text is misaligned so that the stress does not fall on a strong beat. The motivation behind this choice was to allow the text itself to feel misunderstood or distorted. As a musical vehicle for these texts, I seek to reflect the nature of the distortion at play in the religious message by taking inspiration from traditional, mainstream religious music constructions and twisting them in harmony, rhythm, and structure. The music also seeks to evoke pain, isolation, joy, confusion, and other psychological and emotional complexities that seem to exist with members of the WBC.

The cycle is notated as a single piece to indicate that the performance ought to be fluid with little to no break in between songs. The performance of the piece must incorporate visuals to enhance the experience. For each piece, there will be a projection or representation of the corresponding picket sign used by WBC members (i.e. “God Hates Fags,” “God Hates Islam,” “God Loves Dead Soldiers,” etc). In the printed program, each piece will be titled simply as the Bible verses used. This is an attempt to illuminate the dynamic of how the interpretation of these texts is presented by the WBC. The audience will hear the text without being able to truly understand it, they will see WBC’s interpretation of the text on the stage, and they will know that the text has been taken from the Bible by looking at the program, but the connection between all these different threads will be inherently tenuous. A list of the corresponding signs for each song may be found in the table of contents.

The final song in the cycle is understood as a sort of epilogue. This is the only piece not connected with a WBC sign, and thus may be paired with no sign or with one simply titled as Epilogue. It offers a section from the Bible that distinctively contradicts the WBC’s approach to interpretation.

- Andrew Burke
Leviticus 18:26

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments: and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you.

Galatians 1:6-7

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Revelations 13: 4, 7, 9

And they worshipped the dragon which gave power to the beast. And they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like to the beast? And who is able to make war with him? And it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

If any man have an ear, let him hear.

Deuteronomy 32:43

Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to their adversaries, and he will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.
Genesis 2:24
Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Romans 1:28, 29, 31
And even as they liked not to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate knowledge, to do those things which are not convenient.

Being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness; full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity: whisperers,

Foolish, dissolute: without affection, without fidelity, without mercy.

Romans 2:1
Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest. For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest.
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Leviticus 18:26, Galatians 1:6-7

Baritone

Piano

Slower ($j=79$)

Cus-to-di-te

Le-gi-ti-ma me-a at-que iu-di-ci-a et non fa-ci-at ex_om-ni-bus

$5$

sim.
a-bomi-natio-nibus istis tam indigena

quam colonus qui peregrinatur a pud vos

Mi-ror quod sic tam cito transferi-
mini ab eo qui vos vocavit in gratia

am Christi

Chri - sti

cresc.

Chri - sti

Chri - sti

Chri - sti

cresc.
quod non est a - li - ud

ni - si sunt a - li - qui
qui vos conturbant et volunt con - 

vertere e - van - ge - li - 

um Chri - sti
Revelations 13:4,7,9

\( p \)

\( f \)

\( mp \)

ado-ve-run-ten-com-mer, dra

co-nem qui-a de-di-po-tess-am
bes - ti - ae et quis po - te - rit pu - gna -

---

re - cum e - a

---

sim.
et vincere il

los et data est illi potestas facere

nen ses quadraginta duce

mf espress.
au - rem au - di - at
Deuteronomy 32:43
Laudate genites populum

Laudate genites populum eius qui a sanguinem,
nem
ser - vo - rum su - o - rum

ul - ci - sce - tur

Slower (c. $q = 125$) espress.

et vin - dic -

Slower (c. $q = 125$)
tam re-tri-bu-et in hostes e-orum

Tempo 1 \( j = 140 \) \( \text{mf} \)

et pro-

pi-ti-us e-rit terrae populi
Quam ob rem re-lin-quet ho-mo pa-trem su-um et ma-trem et

ad-her-re-bit u-xo-ri su-ae et

er-unt du-o in car-ne u-na
tradi-dit eos

De-us, De-us,

De-us in

re-pro-bum sens-sum ut
faciabant quae

non conveniunt

Tempo 1 (\textit{j} = 90)
Tempo 1 (\( \text{j} = 90 \))

343

\( \text{re-ple-tos} \)

omni iniquitate malitia

350

fornicatione avariitia

\( \text{sub.}\)
ne-qui-ti-a ple-nos in-vi-di-a ho-mi-ci-

di-o

con-tent-ti-o-ne

without pedal
do-lo, do-lo, do-lo malignitate

sus-suro-nes

Slower (c. \( \frac{1}{6} = 81 \))

rit.

\( \text{mp} \)

Slower (c. \( \frac{1}{6} = 81 \))
ad-her-re-bit u-xo-ri,

ad-her-re-bit u-xo-ri su-ae

~ sim.
se-rì-cor-di-a

397

pp
e-runt du-o in car-ne un-na

402

mf
e-runt du-o in car-ne
Romans 2:1

\( \text{ff} \)

\( \text{sim.} \)

\( \text{ff} \)

428 Faster (\( \text{j = 120} \))

\( \text{ff} \)

\( \text{prop - ter quod } \)

\( \text{in-ex-cu-sa - bi-lis es o} \)

435

\( \text{ho-mo, o ho - mo} \)
omnis qui iu-der omnis qui iu-der

in quo e-nim iu-di cas,

iu-di-cas al-te-rum te ip-sum con-dem-nas, con-