

John the Revelator – Author’s Note

Who’s that writing? John the Revelator!

Those were the words coming out of my radio speaker. I was a teenager in Akron, Ohio. The voice, which seemed to reach back to the beginnings of time, was that of the great Son House, though the song was actually written by gospel-blues legend Blind Willie Johnson. Before I even began to write this Mass I chose the title **John the Revelator** because the song is like a window to a deeper world. The ritual of the Mass itself is a kind of spiritual portal through which one can become part of a universal body. I figured I might enter that portal myself in the process of discovery, and I wished to pass unburdened by a rigid plan, formal or stylistic. This is not a “blues” Mass any more than it is a medieval one, though such music lurks near my heart, along with doo-wop, Byrd, Bruckner, Brian Wilson and Oum Khalsoum.

My concept was to set the traditional Latin Ordinary (the parts of the Mass that remain the same from week to week) for chorus alone, and to add my own set of Propers (the parts that change according to season) using a variety of texts, and to have those sections accompanied by the string quartet. The texts I ultimately chose suggest a narrative of redemption in a blighted world. Several are from the Old Testament, including two from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Rather than use the New Testament apocalypse of Revelation, I chose one by the American poet David Shapiro, whose image of indifferently falling snow recalls the ashes falling from the skies of lower Manhattan. Offered as a prayer, Samuel Beckett’s monologue *The Unnamable* brilliantly portrays the struggle of the mind in present tense. And while *Dark Was the Night* has no text that can be heard, it is a fantasy on Willie Johnson’s 1927 recording of an old hymn depicting Jesus’ doubt at the Passion, paraphrased in wordless moaning.

Bookending the Mass are treatments of two early American shape-note hymns from the *The Sacred Harp: Northport* and *Wondrous Love*, which have long been favorites of mine. They stir the vestiges of an unforgettable and mysterious beauty, the sound of the strong emotion, unconditional and utterly lacking in malice, that I remember from the rural religion I witnessed as a child in Pennsylvania and Ohio. It seems like a dream in today’s blurred politic. My favorite part of religion has always been the mystery. *What wondrous love is this?* Not reasoned or forced, it’s just there.

John the Revelator – Program Order

1. **Northport**
2. **Hear my prayer**
3. **The Man Who Knows Misery**
4. **Kyrie**
5. **Gloria**
6. **The Snow Fell**
7. **Alone**
8. **The Unnamable**
9. **Credo**
10. **Dark Was The Night**
11. **Offertorium**
12. **Sanctus**
13. **Everywhere**
14. **Agnus Dei**
15. **Communio**
16. **Wondrous Love**

John the Revelator – Program Texts

1. **Northport** (words by John Cennick, 1743, tune by R. R. Osborne, 1850)

Jesus, my all to heav'n is gone,
Glory Hallelujah;
He whom I fix my hopes upon!
Glory Hallelujah!

I want a seat in Paradise,
Glory Hallelujah!
I love that union never dies,
Glory Hallelujah!

His track I see and I'll pursue,
Glory Hallelujah;
The narrow way till Him I view,
Glory Hallelujah!

Lo! glad I come and Thou, dear Lamb,
Glory Hallelujah;
Shalt take me to Thee as I am,
Glory, Hallelujah!

2. Hear My Prayer (words from Psalm 102)

Yahweh, hear my prayer
And let my cry come up to you.

For my days are vanishing like smoke.

3. The Man Who Knows Misery (from the 3rd Lamentation of Jeremiah)

I am the man who knows misery,
I have suffered by the rod of his fury,
He has guided me into darkness, not light.
He has walled me in so I cannot escape,
He has closed my ways with blocks of stone,
He has weighed me down with chains,
And when I try to cry for help
He extinguished my prayer.

Yahweh, you have heard my voice,
You have told me not to fear,
You have defended my cause,
Redeemer of my life,
Repay them, as their deeds deserve.

4. Kyrie

Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison
Kyrie eleison

Lord have mercy upon us
Christ have mercy upon us
Lord have mercy upon us

5. Gloria

Gloria in excelsis deo.
Et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis.

Glory be to God on high.
And on earth, peace
to men of good will.

*Laudamus te,
benedicimus te,
adoramus te,
glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnum gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex Caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine fili unigenite,
Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,
Filius Patris,
Qui tollis peccata mundi
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi
Suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus Sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus,
Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.*

We praise you,
we bless you,
we worship you,
we glorify you,
We give thanks to you
for your great glory.
Lord God, king of heaven,
God the father almighty.
Lord, only-begotten son,
Jesus Christ.
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.
Who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Who takes away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer,
Who sits at the right hand of the father,
have mercy upon us.
For you alone are Holy,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the highest,
Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen

6. Song: The Snow Fell (words by David Shapiro)

And so the snow fell
And covered up poetry.

And so the snow fell
And covered up cities like bags of leaves.

And so the snow fell
and covered up an architecture.

And so the snow fell
and covered our friends.

And so the snow fell
and covered up one red orange sexual flower.

And so the snow fell
and covered the clear watertowers, the windows and the doors.

And so the snow fell
and covered up the fire and a house within.

And so the snow fell
and fell on their fallen trees.

And oh the snow fell
And covered up the photographs of snow.

And so the snow fell
And covered up even passing clouds.

7. Alone (words from the 1st Lamentation of Jeremiah)

Alone, the empty city, once full of people,
Now like a widow, alone.
Once great among the nations, among the peoples,
Who was a queen is now a slave.

She weeps long into the night,
The streets are filled with tears,
There are no lovers to comfort her.
Her friends have all betrayed her
And become her enemies.

8. Meditation: The Unnamable (words by Samuel Beckett)

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on.

(Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend a day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far. Perhaps that is how it began. You think you are simply resting, the better to act when the time comes, or for no reason, and you soon find yourself powerless ever to do anything again. No matter how it happened. It, say it, not knowing what...)

...I shall not be alone, in the beginning. I am of course alone. Alone. That is soon said. Things have to be soon said. And how can one be sure, in such darkness?

9. Credo

*Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem coeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum, Iesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum,
et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero,
Genitum, non factum,
Consubstantiali Patri,
Per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui, propter nos homines,
et propter nostram salutem,
descendit de caelis.
Et incarnatus est de spiritu Sancto
Ex Maria virgine,
Et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis
sub Pontio Pilato;
passus et sepultus est.
Et resurrexit tertia die,
secundum scripturas;
et ascendit in caelum,*

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
only-begotten son of God,
born of his father before all worlds.
God of God, light of light,
true God of true god,
begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father
by whom all things were made.
Who for us men,
and our salvation
came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit
out of the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
He was crucified for us
under Pontius Pilate,
suffered and was buried.
And the third day he rose again,
according to scriptures
and ascended to heaven,

*sedet ad dextram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria
Iudicare vivos et mortuos,
cuius regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum
Dominum et vivificantem,
Qui ex Patre procedit
qui ex Patre et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur;
qui locutus est per Prophetas.
Et unam sanctam catholicam et
apostolicam ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum
et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.*

sitting at the right hand of the Father.
And he shall come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead,
whose kingdom shall have no end,
And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who goes from the Father,
who with Father and Son together
is worshipped and glorified,
who spoke by the prophets,
And in one holy catholic
and apostolic church.
I confess one baptism
for the remission of sins.
And I expect the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen

12. Sanctus & Benedictus

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus sabaoth.
Pleni sunt Coeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.*

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

*Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Osanna in excelsis.*

Blessed are those who come
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

13. Song: Everywhere (words by David Shapiro)

In my cup

In the thin snow

In front of your window
In the window sky
In the blue distance
In the scattered doors

In the pool near your room
In the shadow on the highway
In every quarter of the evening land
In the staves of the sky

I seem to hear your voice

14. Agnus Dei

*Agnus Dei
Qui tollis peccata mundi
Miserere nobis.*

Lamb of God
Who takes away the sins of the world
Have mercy upon us.

Agnus Dei

Lamb of God

*Qui tollis peccata mundi
Miserere nobis.*

Who takes away the sins of the world
Have mercy upon us.

*Agnus Dei
Qui tollis peccata mundi
Dona nobis pacem.*

Lamb of God
Who takes away the sins of the world
Grant us peace.

16. Wondrous Love (words from *Dupuy's Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1811, tune by James Christopher, 1840)

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb Who is the great "I Am";
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be;
And through eternity, I'll sing on.