

Equinox Liturgy Unveiled

For the first eighteen years of my life, I experienced the same liturgical music at church. Hundreds of, and perhaps more than a thousand times, did I sing the same “Setting 1” from the Lutheran Book of Worship. And, while the words and melodies became committed to memory, my commitment to this music never extended beyond Sunday service. The liturgy never became a greater part of my life that I might wish to sing or hum or contemplate anytime anywhere. Thus, for me, it seemed to lack the transformational power inherent in any repeated activity. In other words, if one is to engage in something over and over and over, perhaps there might be attached a more personal meaning?

Standing up and sitting down and standing up, perfunctory recitations from Old and New Testaments, the unison drone of creeds and prayers, hymns set to music centuries old, nagging doubts and guilt unassuaged, all were enough that I rarely came away from church in any way *inspired*. Nor was there anything profoundly *comforting* about the experience, other than socializing with friends. Jesus died for *my* sins? This was beyond comprehension. Thus, for the next fifteen years of my life, for all intensive purposes, I no longer heeded the call to worship.

My return to church (Our Saviour’s Atonement) in May of 2001 found me seeking to understand both the imposed eighteen-year sentence, as well as my nearly *equal and opposite* reaction to it. While there were no easy answers, I was immediately encouraged upon hearing and singing a *new* (to me) liturgy. And, in June, yet *another* unfamiliar liturgy! Had Lutherans busted out of their rut? Might I break out of mine? There seemed to be a glimmer of hope. I soon discovered there were numerous musical settings for the church service and even one that had been composed by a former member of OSA. This was an epiphany indeed, and thus planted was the seed for composing my own liturgical setting someday.

In the summer of 2002, I composed three or four lines of melody and text, based on Marvin Gaye’s “God is Love”. There was nothing further, and it was clear to me at the time that I had neither the tools nor the inspiration to continue. I had only scratched the surface of my own understanding about Christianity and my path within and without it. How could I compose music and words about something to which I had little depth of knowledge? So, I focused my attention toward serving on church committees, the council, founding a subscription concert series, all the while always reading and thinking.

In November 2005, cellist Jay Good contacted me about performing with him and his wife Rita, a mezzo-soprano. I had two-weeks prior written the text to “Psalm 2005”, a *Credo* of sorts, and completed the music for voice, cello, and soprano saxophone on Jay’s birthday, 11 November. We premiered it on 23 December. Suddenly, Jay and Rita and their two daughters were moving to Phoenix and in May, I began composing a farewell canon, which evolved into a *canonic passacaglia* dedicated to Ron and Marjorie Lorenz, friends from church who had both passed in 2004 and had left funds for a memorial chapel and library. This contrapuntal *Gloria* was premiered with violin, viola, cello, trumpet, trombone, soprano saxophone, organ and seven-voice choir on 3 June 2006, during the Lorenz Chapel dedication ceremony.

Without warning, two parts of a six-part liturgy were now realized! With tools at my disposal and the requisite inspiration, I completed the *Equinox Liturgy* in July 2006.

Liturgy is defined as: the form of service used to celebrate Communion in a Christian denomination. Borrowed directly from the Catholic Mass, the traditional form consists of the following five parts set to music:

<i>Kyrie</i>	“Lord, Have Mercy”
<i>Gloria</i>	“Glory to God”
<i>Credo</i>	“I Believe”
<i>Sanctus</i>	“Holy, Holy, Holy”
<i>Agnus Dei</i>	“Lamb of God” (“...You Take Away the Sins of the World”)

And, the optional:

Ite, Misse Est “Go, the Mass is Finished”

Drawing inspiration from Johannes Brahms, who selected new texts for his *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, that his Mass for the Dead might be *universally comforting* to Christians and non-Christians alike, I set to renew these ancient texts that they might also be *universally comforting* while communicating to a wider audience. Adhering to tradition, the *Equinox Liturgy* consists of the following six parts set to music:

<i>Kyrie</i>	“Listen”
<i>Gloria</i>	“We Give, We Live”
<i>Credo</i>	“Psalm 2005”
<i>Sanctus</i>	“All Are One”
<i>Agnus Dei</i>	“Let Go”
<i>Ite, Misse Est</i>	“Sing a Song of Song” (by K Garrett, arr. Noyes)

What are we looking for when we ask, “Lord, have mercy”? We are asking God to listen, to guide, and to comfort. All God asks of us in return is that we give each other love (with homage to Marvin Gaye!). The greatest “Glory to God” is when we forever give thanks and praise while living our lives in service to Him. Seeing as the “Apostle’s Creed” is perhaps the single greatest obstacle to Christ’s message, it seems appropriate to focus on more tangible beliefs, such as being thankful, being in a generous mood, practicing kindness, compassion, and understanding, in an attempt to be forever renewed each day. My favorite definition of “Holy” is nothing other than wholeness. To be whole in Christ, is to be “at one” or “all one” with Him and the whole of creation. Jesus, the “Lamb of God”, is not powerful enough to take away the sins to which we cling and hold fast. Thus, let go of fears, doubts, worries and He will gladly take them. Finally, the inspirationally rhythmic and tuneful “Sing a Song of Song” provides a wonderful message of peaceful celebration as we go on our separate ways to face the challenges of the week ahead.

Presented in March and September, *Equinox Liturgy*, with its message of *balance* and *unity*, is intended to provide both *inspiration* and *comfort*. Composed with gifts revealed to me by the Holy Spirit, it is my life’s work.

Equinox Liturgy Illuminated

Equinox, the halfway point between the solstices (longest and shortest days of the year), is when all points on earth are *equally balanced* with 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness.

The title of *Equinox Liturgy* comes directly from John Coltrane's minor blues, "Equinox". This tune's repeated rhythmic bass line was borrowed directly for use in the *Kyrie*. Unlike the original blues, the bass line of "Listen" never deviates from G#-B-C# (c# minor), thus it takes on the character of a chant. Coltrane's musical suite, *A Love Supreme*, states, "Dear Listener: ALL PRAISE BE TO GOD TO WHOM ALL PRAISE IS DUE.", and begins with a repeated rhythmic bass line that ultimately becomes a vocal chant – "*A Love Supreme*, ..." "Listen" borrows this idea, chanting words of Marvin Gaye, "All You ask of us: give each other love..."

The *Gloria* ("We Give, We Live") consists of two melodies, which use all pitches *except* G#, B, and C# (from "Listen"). The opening melody (in g minor) consists of many leaps and changes of direction, while the second melody (also in g minor) is nearly *opposite* in character with half-steps descending. Both are then treated in canon (the oldest musical form), the top in four parts with the bottom in two. In canon, simple music can sound complicated, causing distractions, but the metaphor is of life: we are given two simple commandments to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Failing to learn our part, the music of life becomes disorienting and difficult. Staying focused on these two simple elements, the music of life remains beautiful.

"Psalm 2005" is a *Credo* upon which all people of faith can agree. The stark and mystical setting, reminiscent of the late 19th-century, is an attempt to draw the listener to its meaning. As in the *Gloria*, the two moving lines are *complimentary opposites*; the third remains forever on G. "In the beginning", before words, were sounds, and thus the *Credo* begins only with vowels, which evolve into the opening "o eternal everlasting". The melody speaks for itself while the low C# and high G are *reminders* of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*. And, even when G-- seems so distant as not to be heard, we must continue our practice of renewal.

The sentiment of *Sanctus*, "All Are One", comes directly from John 17:20-26; or does it come directly from the American transcendentalists of the 19th-century? or does it come directly from Pythagoras? It seems to come from *all* of the above! Indeed, all *are* one (or even all *is* one). This idea of *separateness* is where Adam and Eve (we) went wrong... The tune includes a chorus sung in Spanish – again, all people, all languages, all things, are *one*.

"Let Go" is constructed with 11 of the 12 musical pitches, yet the one absent pitch is the most important: Eb. Without this pitch, the entire piece has no foundation, and thus is the metaphor of *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God, who, while not physically here, is with us spiritually to take away our sins – but, only if we have the courage and freedom to let them go.

“Sing a Song of Song” restores the missing tonality of Eb with a wonderfully spiritual tune written by Coltrane disciple, Kenny Garrett. To enter heaven, one must become a child once again, and never, ever lose one’s sense awe and wonder. And, as children, we must remain forever open, receiving the gifts of life with our hearts, our minds, and our eyes. The *Ite Missa Est* sends us on our way as messengers of peace. The transformative nature of Eb reveals a D#, leading us to newer heights and the key of E Major. And, what is so wonderful, is that E Major shares the same set of pitches as the opening c# minor, thus *Equinox Liturgy* ends where it began, on the repeating G#–B–C# motive. Here, the message from Galatians is spoken, and we are reminded that to be alone (all – one), is to be closer to God.

- - - J R Noyes, March 2007

The Impulse of *Equinox Liturgy*

The *Equinox Liturgy*, a Christian Service of Unity, was written to encourage a restoration of *balance* within our lives, knowing that the only way we can change our world is by changing ourselves. The impulse of *Equinox* is fourfold: traditional, universal, inspirational, and invitational.

- The music of *Equinox* is composed in the traditional, centuries-old liturgical setting of the Ordinary Mass: *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei* and *Ite Misse Est*; (for further information, see “*Equinox Liturgy Unveiled*”). It features a variety of musical styles and interconnected forms, all of which serve the work as a whole.
- The universal Christian message of “oneness” is the message of *Equinox*. The musical form, which ends exactly as it begins, represents oneness, and the lyrics and New Testament readings present sentiments of “all are one”, “atonement” (at – one – ment), and being “alone” (all – one).
- To be inspired, one must engage in breathing deeply. The melodies of *Equinox* are simply composed in lengthy phrases, requiring deep breaths to sing in their entirety. The key to a healthier life, both mentally and physically, not to mention *spirit*-ually, is through the breath.
- The music of *Equinox* is both inviting to sing and to play. It is written to be flexibly performed by musicians of all skill levels, in virtually any combination of voices and instruments with minimal rehearsal time. This fosters greater congregational interest and encourages active participation throughout the service.

Our greatest God-given gift for both expressing joy as well as surviving in times of crisis is a voice with which to *sing*. *Equinox Liturgy* provides a powerful vehicle for reconnecting with and (in some cases) reawakening our voices – that is to say, our *spirits* – as a way to support our lives and our world, all of which hang in the *balance*.

- - - J R Noyes