

Lamentations, Light, and Hope

Michael Winikoff



(candle image from <https://pixabay.com/p-1705431/>)

Program Notes

When composing for choir, I always start with the text. The text sets the mood and feel of the piece, sometimes suggests structure, and sometimes even suggests particular rhythms.

However, for this piece, I struggled initially to find a suitable text. I didn't want to use an older poet, but the more modern texts were under copyright. So I turned to the bible, looking at the *Lamentations*, which I thought would fit into the theme of "darkness". However, the *Lamentations* did not really inspire me as a relevant and emotional text, until I found a discussion which made the point that the *Lamentations* are not about mourning, but about the experience of being a refugee:

"The observances of *Tish'a B'Av*¹—fasting from food and sexual contact, not washing or wearing clean clothes, not being able to sit anywhere except on the ground—are closer to the experience of being a refugee than being a mourner. . . . *Tish'a B'Av* is not primarily about the end of the Temple . . . Rather, it's about homelessness, fleeing from war into famine, being thrown into a hostile world without shelter or protection — things that are all too present in our world." (<http://www.neohasid.org/pdf/EikhahLaments2016booklet.pdf>, page 26)

Suddenly, this wasn't just an Iron Age text mourning the fall of Jerusalem: it was about an issue that, sadly, is very relevant and important today. Writing in Liverpool, I was very mindful of the ongoing conflict in Syria, of "brexit", and of the politically-motivated demonisation of refugees and migrants. The resulting piece is about refugees, and in particular the link with war, and the experience of war, especially from the perspective of women.

The piece is in four sections. The first two sections of the piece, setting the *Lamentations* text, fit with the theme of darkness and invite the audience to consider "...the ways in which we as individuals, and as a people, use our power to make others (people and species) into refugees" (ibid). The setting of the first verse (in the first section) begins with the strings building up a dramatic rhythm that leads to the declamatory question: "How can it be that she sits alone?"

While the first section could be seen as a narrator telling the story of the fall of Jerusalem, the second section is more personal, setting text (*Lamentations* 1:2) in which "she cries in the night". This section also includes text from the ancient Greek play *Trojan Women*, in which Andromache speaks to her infant son Astyanax, who is about to be killed by the invading Greeks. The play, by Euripedes, considers the aftermath of the Trojan war and how the women of Troy are affected by the war. The selected lines capture a more personal suffering: how an individual, a mother, is affected by the war around her. The lines are set more sparsely, and are sung by a solo voice. This is followed by a reprise of the rhythmical strings representing the march of war, and the suffering that follows.

The final two sections form a contrast, turning to light and hope. For the third section I chose to just use the words "light and hope", translated into Latin (since "Lux" is much nicer to sing than "Light"). This *a cappella* section has some harmonic clashes, conveying yearning. Continuing the theme of hope, the final section is a setting of the first verse of *Song For Equal Suffrage* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935). Given the earlier focus on how women suffer in war, and 2018 being the 125th anniversary of women first being given the vote by a sovereign nation, it felt appropriate to highlight women's suffrage as one aspect in which progress towards a better world has been made. This section is set in an unashamedly popular style, and is intended to inspire hope.

The closing message of this work is that we should not curse the darkness, but rather light the candle of hope—and then act to fix the world. While there is never a lack of bad news, there is also much progress to celebrate², including reductions in poverty, and improvements in literacy, health, and freedom. Rather than be overwhelmed by darkness and fall into despairing inaction, we should take hope, and act.

¹ A Jewish day of fasting and mourning, when the *Lamentations* are read. *Tish'a B'Av* (literally: the ninth day of the month Av) commemorates the destruction of both the first and second temple, as well as a number of other disasters.

²<https://ourworldindata.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/>

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Performance Notes

Bars 14-21: the Sopranos should mime if this is too low.

Bar 25: the first note in the Alto part has a *tenuto*. The first note in the Soprano part intentionally does not.

Bar 27: the double bass part is marked “solo”. However, at the conductor’s discretion additional bass players could also play to give the sound more depth.

In the section after rehearsal figure B (bars 29-63 or so) the choir needs to be careful with the difference between short (quaver) first notes (e.g. “once” in bars 30 and 34) and longer (crotchet) first notes (e.g. “full” in bars 31 and 35).

In bar 37, possibly could slow down a little (but back up to the original tempo at figure C).

In bar 57 the tremolo should be measured (semiquavers for violins and violas and quavers for the cellos and double basses).

In bar 77, at the conductor’s discretion, some (or even most) of the double basses could cut off on the third beat, with only some continuing to hold the low D with half of the cellos.

In the second section, the part marked “Soprano Solo” could be sung by a soloist, or by a semichorus. The sound should not be overly operatic: this part needs to sound like a single voice lamenting.

Bar 108: the tempo change should be such that the rhythm in the previous two bars is the same as the rhythm in this bar (but with a shorter rest at the end of each group of three notes).

Possible staging: if deemed appropriate (and practical), the lighting could be turned off simultaneously with the last chord of the second section (bar 119). The third section (“Lux”) could commence in (almost) darkness, with the choir gradually lighting candles (or, if safety regulations disallow this, flash-lights³).

Bars 135 and 136: careful with the clash between the E (S1) and F (A1). The latter should be slightly stronger.

Bars 156-158: “Lu(x)” indicates that the final “x” sound should be left out.

The opening of Section 4 marked “(Solo)” in bars 171-174 could also be done by a semi-chorus, or by just the first sopranos (or just the seconds).

Possible staging: if deemed appropriate, the conductor could turn around and cue the audience to sing along with the choir from around bar 218. If done, the conductor also needs to indicate to the audience to stop singing around bar 232.

In the last six bars the choir should stagger breath if needed.

³Mobile phones could also be used, but care needs to be taken that they are *all* on flight mode and do not have any alarms set ...

Text

I

(Lamentations 1:1, translation by Michael Winikoff)

How can it be that she sits alone?

The city once so full of people now sits as a widow

Once great among the nations, now she is a slave

(How can it be that she sits alone?)

II

(Lamentations 1:2, translation by Michael Winikoff)

Crying, she cries in the night

Crying, her tears on her cheek

Of all her lovers none shall comfort her

(Crying, she cries in the night)

(Crying, her tears on her cheek)

All her friends betrayed her

(Crying, she cries in the night)

(Crying, her tears on her cheek)

(Trojan Women⁴, translation from Greek by Professor Gilbert Murray, 1915)

Go, die, [my best-beloved,] my cherished one, ...

... Thou little thing

That curlest in my arms

... Kiss me.

III

Lux. Lux et spem.

IV

(Verse 1 of "Song for Equal Suffrage" from "Suffrage Songs and Verses"⁵ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman)

Day of hope [and] day of glory! After slavery and woe,

Comes the dawn of woman's freedom, and the light shall grow and grow

Until every man and woman equal liberty shall know,

In Freedom marching on!

⁴<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10096>

⁵<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/gilman/suffrage/suffrage.html>

Lamentations, Light and Hope

Duration approx. 10:00

Michael Winikoff

I. Lamentation

Lamentations 1:1

♩ = 108

Sopranos

Altos

Piano (rehearsal only)

ff *p* *cresc.*

10

A *rit.* *ff* *♩ = 70, strong, declamatory* 15

S How can it be that —

A *rit.* *ff* How can it be that —

rit. *ff* *♩ = 70, strong, declamatory*

S *f* 20
 — she sits a - lone — How can it be that — she sits a -

A *f*
 — she sits a - lone — How can it be that — she sits a -

f

S *mf* 25
 lone — that — she sits a - lone —

A *mf*
 lone — can it be that she sits a - lone —

mf

S B *p* 30
 The ci - ty once so full of peo - ple the

A *p*
 The ci - ty once so full of peo - ple the

p

S *mf* 35 ci - ty once so full of peo - ple now sits as a wi - dow now sits as a wi - dow a

A *mf* ci - ty once so full of peo - ple now sits as a wi - dow now sits as a wi - dow a

mf 3

S [C] 45 wi - dow How can it be that — she sits a -

A wi - dow as a wi - dow How can it be that — she sits a -

mp

S *mp* 50 lone — Once, once great a - mong the na - tions once, once great a -

A *mp* lone — Once, once great a - mong the na - tions once, once great a -

(not staccato)

55 *mf* 60

S mong the na-tions once, once great a - mong the na-tions once, once

A mong the na-tions once, once great a - mong the na-tions once, once

mf

65 *f* **D**

S great a - mong the na-tions now she is a slave — now she is a

A great a - mong the na-tions now she is a slave — now she is a

f

70

S slave — a slave — she sits — as a widow — a

A slave — a slave — she sits — as a widow — a

S
widow as a wi - dow

A
widow as a wi - dow

75 *rit.* *a tempo* (♩ = 70)

S

A

p (echo, freer tempo) 80 *(pp)*

A
How can it be that she sits a - lone a - lone a - lone

p

Attacca

II. Crying

Lamentations 1:2, Euripedes' *The Trojan Women*
Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10096>

85 $\text{♩} = 40$

Soprano Solo

Sopranos

Altos

Piano (rehearsal only)

$\text{♩} = 40$

mp *p*

mp

S Cry-ing she cries in the night Cry-ing her tears on her cheek

A *mp* Of all her lo-vers _

S 90 Cry-ing she cries in the night Cry-ing her tears on her cheek

A none shall com _ fort her

95

S Cry-ing she cries in the night *mp*

A All her friends, her friends be-trayed — her Cry-ing she cries in the

mf, painfully

Solo Go, die, —

S Cry-ing her tears on her cheek

A night Cry-ing her tears on her cheek

100

Solo go, — die, — my che-rished one go die — my che-rished one Thou

105

Solo lit-tle thing — that cur — lest in my arms. Kiss me. Kiss me. *(echo)* $\text{♩} = \text{♩ (i.e. ♩ = 120)}$

p

110

cresc.

115

E
rit.

ff

120

Attacca

III. Lux

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'The Lux' by David Lang. The score is written for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto 1, Alto 2, and Piano (rehearsal only). The tempo is marked as 72 beats per minute. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 125 to 130, and the second system covers measures 130 to 135. The lyrics 'Lux' are written below the vocal staves. The piano part includes a rehearsal mark at measure 130. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (p, mp, mf), and articulation marks (accents, slurs).

140 *mp* *mf* 145

S1 *Lux* *mp* *mf* *Lux* *Lux*

S2 *Lux* *mp* *mf* *Lux* *Lux*

A1 *mp* *mf* *Lux* *Lux*

A2 *mp* *mf* *Lux* *Lux*

150 *f* *ff* (no dim.) **G**

S1 *Lux* *f* *ff* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes*

S2 *f* *ff* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes*

A1 *f* *ff* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes*

A2 *f* *ff* *p* *Lux et spes* *Lux et spes* *Lu(x)*

160 *p* *pp* 165 *ppp*

S1 *p* *pp* *ppp* *Lu(x)* *Lux* *Lux*

S2 *p* *pp* *ppp* *Lu(x)* *Lux* *Lux*

A1 *p* *pp* *ppp* *Lux et spe(s)* *Lux* *Lux*

A2 *pp* *ppp* *Attacca* *Lux* *Lux*

IV Hope

Verse 1 of "Song For Equal Suffrage" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)
Suffrage Songs and Verses. by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. New York: The Charlton Company, 1911. Pp.22-23

♩ = 90

170 rit. mf a tempo (Solo)

All Day of hope day of

♩ = 90

mp

Piano (rehearsal only)

175 Tutti

glo - ry day of hope day of glo - ry af - ter sla - ve - ry and

mf

180

rit. a tempo

185

woe comes the dawn of wo-man's free-dom comes the dawn of wo-man's

rit. a tempo

cresc.

cresc.

190 rit. a tempo

free - dom and the light shall grow and grow un - til e - very man and

rit. f a tempo

195

rit. a tempo

f

200 205

wo-man e - qual li - ber - ty shall know, un - til e - very man and wo-man

210

e - qual li - ber - ty shall know in — free-dom mar-ching on in — free-dom mar-ching

215

Sopranos on in — free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching on in —

Altos on in — free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching on in —

220

S free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching

A free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching on in — free - dom mar-ching

225

S on in free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar-ching on in

A on in free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar-ching on in

230

S free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar - ching -

A free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar-ching on in free - dom mar - ching -

235 *a tempo*

S On

A On

240

rit. *a tempo*

v1, 13 June 2017, Liverpool, UK
v2, 9 October 2017, Dunedin, New Zealand
v3, 1 February 2018, Dunedin, New Zealand.