

## **The Aran Mass**

**Martin Burke**  
**Blekerijstraat 12**  
**8310 Assebroek/Brugge**  
**Belgium**  
[martin.burke@telenet.be](mailto:martin.burke@telenet.be)

The Mass has long been a form for inspiration and interpretation for musicians yet poetry has, so far, not taken up the possibilities which its many parts offer. The following is an attempt to do just that –to raise a song of celebration that takes its impetus from the structure and purpose of the Mass and by utilizing its individual parts make, not a replica of ritual, but a living expression of how it has presented itself to one mind.

## INTROIT

Genesis  
Word and light  
All things in the light of the word  
All things in glory to the light

Beginnings  
Sea, rock, stone, light  
And the first verbs spoken on the first morning

The sea a beginning  
The stars a surplus of light  
And language weaving a path there

*“And if I do not sing for you  
Then for what shall I sing  
And to who shall I direct my song?”*

Light and the first word  
The first *Gloria* of the genesis  
Light on the waves as they break on the shore with verbs and vowels and all the intricacies of speech

For these things  
For these things

Song on the shore  
First shoreline of the world on the first morning of genesis  
*As it was in the beginning*  
Light and the first spoken words  
And the first notes of the hymns of morning

Morning –*most beautiful and new*  
Morning –and the first celebration of the introit  
You the universal bride  
Towards who all things stream  
And all songs are directed

On the first and second day  
On the first beginning of the verb in the first *Gloria*

These things  
These things

Praise for the gull that wings over the wave  
And praise for the wave  
Praise for the beginning of the shore as it receives the wave

As the bride receives her lover

I am lover and bride on this the first morning of the world

I am lover and loved – singer and song  
And there is no silence between them

Beginnings  
Word and wave  
The first *Gloria* as it rings like the bells on Aran

All things in the light of the islands and the islands with their sacred harbours and every  
harbour an Ithaca

I sing for the sacred cities and secret groves  
The tree in the garden is the tree of the world  
And this pebble the origin of all things

Sing *Glory, Glory, Glory*  
Sing the secret verb, the sacred word, the language housing both

Sing on the days of creation  
Sing joy and love and the light on all things as the light breaks from Ithaca over Aran

Bride –I will come to you  
I will come with song and expectation  
I will come with the beginnings of all things in my up-raised hands  
I will sing *Gloria* to the day and your beauty  
I will sing nothing else for nothing else should be sung nor will it be

No, neither desolation nor chaos only the auroral darkness of God on the face of all things

Yes, I will sing  
Sing light and stone and wave and gull and I will give them their names

I will sing as song directs me  
-it directs me here and now-  
I will sing the hymns of the beginning and I will know no end

Here on the first evening of creation  
Here with the first bird-song after rain  
Here with the simple and profound joys of language and silence  
Here where the world begins

## **KYRIE**

The heart's first cry is the first *Kyrie*

First fire – first name – first ringing of the bell  
We call on cleansing fire and flame  
We call singing anthems of praise  
First fire in the heart and on the tongue  
First name called on in the first of all things  
First ringing of the bell at the beginning of all things  
Sing loud the sacred name and fire  
Call fire to bless all things  
Fire of light and the engendering name  
Easter and December  
Easter and the first resurrection of all things in cleansing flame  
Sing joy of the heart for this cleansing  
Sing joy of the heart for the flame

*Kyrie, Kyrie*

And to sing at the solstice of all things in summer  
To sing with full abandonment  
Singing the first turnings of the heart and every turn thereafter  
Praise in the heart and praise on the lips  
Praise for the wheat and praise for the bread  
Singing and singing as all things laud the first fire and every fire thereafter  
First fire – first name – what are they but the longings of the heart at Easter and December?  
And the earth resurrecting all things  
All things in the light of the first fire and the first litany  
And the word engendering fire and flame to burn the wanton flame  
Burning at Easter and December  
Burning at the core of all things and the heart then saying all things for the sake of the first utterance

*Kyrie, Kyrie*

Sing? What shall I sing?  
What shall I sing but the name of flame and the first fire  
Singing at Easter and December  
Singing at midnight and near it and always, always at dawn  
Dawn of the first day of the world  
Dawn of flame in the cleansing name  
Dawn – even in winter when it comes  
And always that first utterance shadowing every word thereafter though there is no thereafter  
No, all is bright in flame and word  
Beginning and beginnings and the heart singing *Kyrie, Kyrie, Kyrie*  
All things urging celebration and praise  
And the heart responding and yielding to the word  
And the word at the core of the flame and fire  
O yes, at Easter and December and then thereafter

The heart singing and singing

*Kyrie, Kyrie*

*Kyrie, Kyrie, Kyrie* is the song and voice of all things  
*Kyrie* for the dove descending  
*Kyrie* for the first light of morning  
For the density of the stone and the fluidity of the wave  
For the heart rising and affirming  
For the flame flooding the altars of April  
For Christ in all his beauty  
For the rose that is the symbol of the word  
Engendering word  
Engendering and naming the flame  
Naming these our lives with its shadow and light  
In Flanders cast in the light of Ithaca  
Ithaca and Aran  
Where the bells rang in the morning  
Where I woke to the dove descending  
Where love predestined all things to have a name in the morning  
Where the heart still weaves its longing

*Kyrie, Kyrie*

This is our plea for mercy  
This is the song on our lips

Mercy on all things in the light of Ithaca and Aran

Mercy that streams from the wings of the dove

*Kyrie, Kyrie, Kyrie*

## GLORIA

To what shall I sing glory if not to the dove?  
The dove is the bride in all her finery  
The dove is everything that is beautiful

To what shall I sing glory if not to the bride?  
O come to the bower that I have prepared  
Come and make all things complete

And so morning comes with the dove who is the bride  
And awakes the never-stilled longing of the heart

*Glory, Glory, Glory-*  
All things sing glory in the morning  
As is right and befitting  
And nothing is omitted nor unsaid

Dawn on the harbours of the world  
There is glory on Ithaca and glory on Aran  
And both carry the burning flame at their core

Praise and glory for the gull who circles above the harbours of the world  
Praise and glory for the harbours  
Praise and glory for Ithaca, Jerusalem, and Aran

I sing the one song and have no other-  
What else would you have me sing?

Glory on the light of creation in the light of dawn  
Glory on the words that call out the heart's longing  
Glory on even the lowly things

Rock and stone, water and light  
And all things in the light of the first *Glory be to thee*

To the dove, to the bride  
To the longing for both  
For the words that fail to truly name them

The first glory –how the heart still remembers it  
And calls out again in the self-same voice that first paean of love

In language and longing  
In the hand that holds the stone  
In the hands that cups water to parched lips  
When nothing but the first *Glory be to thee* will suffice  
And the heart was lost  
Lost and bewildered by brightness  
This is the way of flame

Bride, come to this bower  
Dove, descend with flame  
Language, remain faithful to both and let true silence be the verb's intent

I have sung nothing else  
Not will I sing a lesser song

I am lost amid the desolation of the world if you are not near and only in your nearness do I  
find a home

Dove, sweet bride, all language is a net cast wide to hold you  
But who can hold the dove?  
Who can hold the bride?  
Who can hold all the longing of language in a simple word?

I fail and I fail  
All things attest my failure  
Yet still I call *Glory, Glory, Glory*  
As when on the first day of creation I called out to all things

Calling now in the light of morning and the seasons of the night  
Calling in exile  
-all places are exile when the dove is not near-  
Calling to the bride  
Calling among the places of the earth – the fruitful and the barren  
Glory even to exile and longing

*Glory, Glory, Glory*  
To the dove and the bride  
To the sacred and the secret  
To the words that long for both

## **COLLECT**

That these words be heard

That the dove descend

That all thing may be known in the light

## **FIRST READING**

Even now I cannot say if it was Ithaca or Aran. The light shimmered and invited entrance into all that it showed and concealed. I was standing at the harbour, the boats were in and somewhere behind me (though I have no 'proof ' for this) it seemed a bell rang out not just Sanctus but Sanctus and celebration.

The water and the sky reflected each other. There was that special redolence of all things shimmering in the light that had no comparison yet which invited me to enter it and find a home there.

And did I?

Did I respond with all that the heart and mind were surging with at the moment because of the bells?

What I did or did not do does not matter because that moment has not ended and I am still there on the pier looking towards the mainland yet feeling no nostalgia for anything I had left behind.

The bells rang and the air trembled.

It seemed as if a veil was about to fall and expose some truth the day was privy to.

## ALLELUIA

And I will sing-  
Sing joy and light  
And all things in the light of morning

I will sing the song placed in my mouth  
And sing and sing until there is no end to singing

And what should I sing but the joy of the heart  
And with what should I sing it  
If not with the finest notes?

I will sing joy and light and rock and wave-  
Creation most vivid, creation most pure

## 2<sup>nd</sup> READING

We were walking by the shoreline and it was my friend who cited that it we were walking to that distant destination then we were also walking into history.

Into history –into the waving light so that we first were rendered anonymous before identity was restored in the splendid exhilaration of the day.

Yet what did that mean –identity, when the day was as overwhelming as anything could be and the waves held the tempo which defined the pace we walked at.

I thought of precedents –those who on the shore saw miracles occur beyond their expectation and who were because of that known to us.

First to loose then to gain –yes, this seemed to be the way of the world and the intention of the day as we walked on into our shadows.

Into history –into precedent and wonderment. Into the splendid otherness of the day. Into the very quiddity that eluded a name we sought for –searching for it here but missing the mark unless it be the mark of acknowledgement.

## CREDO

To make, at all times, the sign of affirmation  
To select the choicest verbs  
To walk in the light that is weaned from Jerusalem

Light and stone, wave and rock  
And the first *Gloria* rising in the mouth

The first *Gloria* –what is that  
But the heart in its bright bewilderment  
Singing its bright unknowing

Or knowing in the way that it can be known  
And not by some other?

Attest, attest the core and the sepal  
Let the seed be the tree  
And the wave the music of the first *Gloria*

Which is where language begins  
Where all things begin and where they end  
In that movement which has no ending

This is the only thing I know-  
Suffer, love, celebration  
The triad of the heart as it moves from station to station

Where begins again the unknowing  
And the next *Gloria*

Genesis, word and light-  
From this all things  
For this all things

Genesis, word and light-  
The heart's true deliverance

Affirmations also in the heart of winter  
When the ice comes  
When the winds blow from the north and the rose is chilled

Singing then of Ithaca, Aran and Jerusalem  
Counting the steps from the one to the other  
Finding that they are the one heart of the world

O Jerusalem I have walked on your stones  
Aran I have loved you  
Ithaca –all the harbours of the world mirror your name

And always a beginning  
Never an end  
Never the destination of the dove  
Though the dove and the bride hover about the harbours of the world

O Yes  
It is for the bride and the dove that all things are sung

It is their names which bless all things  
It is their names which give form to all things

Again, again, like wave on a shore  
Their shadows shadow the world

In what can I reside if not in this shadow  
And for whom shall I sing if not for the bride?

Even in winter  
Even when the rose is chilled by the wind from the north  
Even when the day shortens towards the solstice

Till the child is born in December  
Till redemption opens like the rose  
And like the rose blooms and blossoms by the wall

O yes, for this I sing at this station-  
Flanders  
Flanders that could be Ithaca and/or Jerusalem

Flanders that could be Aran when the shadows come  
Where the shadows do not threaten

O yes, for this I sing and the continuation of the rose in history  
As into history and precedent goes  
The one word of the heart

## OFFERTORY

Slowly, and with gifts, we approach the table  
Lord, bless these gifts

We bring what is good from the earth  
We bring fruits and hope

We hesitate –and this is fitting  
Hesitate then advance

The earth is good  
All the signs are good

The gifts in our hands  
Are the gifts of our hearts

Accept, accept  
Accept what we bring

We bring the longings our lives  
We bring what is sacred to us

Lord, bless these gifts  
Accept what we bring as tribute

Slowly we approach the table  
Slowly all things turn and transform

In the turning, in the transformation  
Rests our hope

In the turning, in the transformation  
Rests the core of our lives

All things turn  
All things transform

The earth yields its worth  
In grains and seed

Water bless all  
With what it contains

And yet we hesitate

What is fitting for the festal table?  
What can we bring to do honour to this moment?

Longings and hope, longings and hope,  
We come with longings and hope

We are pilgrims to this table  
And the table is sacred

We have come by many ways  
Those ways that are wholesome and unwholesome

We come with the present and the past  
We come with brittle histories

What we are these gifts proclaim  
What we would be these gifts indicate

Change and change again  
All turns and transforms

But we in this time  
We in this evening of the world

For what can we hope with certainty?  
What can we claim from the table?

We claim a cleansing  
We claim the gifts transformation from wheat to bread

We also are seed  
Scattered on the by-roads of the world

We shiver in the winter  
And die in that wind

Evening, evening of the world  
Only you can accept what we come with

As we come with these gifts

Hesitating yet hopeful  
Human to the core

So do not hesitate  
Accept, accept

Bless the giver and the gift  
Accept what is intended

As all things move from shadow to light  
So may we also move

**SECRET**

In silence  
Silence and expectation  
The heart makes its plea

May the light respond  
May all things celebrate  
May all names be known and blessed

## **PREFACE**

Before all things  
Before all names  
That name which is the core

Before the first light  
Before the first darkness  
The auroral dark of God

Before this prayer  
Before these words  
The hidden prayer of the heart

Exposed now  
Made open to  
The cleansing by the dove

## SANCTUS

And out of memory bells mingle with the bells of the present  
I was elsewhere and am here  
Echo and echo but which is which when all bells ring *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*  
Dawn and Easter  
Even among the strange places of the world  
*Sanctus, Sanctus*, yes, the heart also rings with the bells  
At dawn and in the many seasons of the night  
Here or elsewhere  
Ithaca, Flanders, Aran or Jerusalem  
Wherever the bells ring out their loud paeon  
And the many waters of the world echoing them  
In pools and secret paces  
And in the sacred sites of the world  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, your bells also ring *Sanctus* to the world  
And Ithaca embraces the first of many notes

Praise for the bells!  
Praise for the clarity of echoes in the morning!  
Praise for the responding heart!

*Sanctus, Sanctus*, the bells tell the legends of the day  
The heart replies –O the heart replies and replies  
All things in splendid celebration  
And the word ‘*yielding*’ rising to the lips and inhabiting the soul  
O yes, morning and the seasons of night  
Here and elsewhere  
Flanders and Jerusalem –and what distance between them?  
None  
None that hinders the heart  
None that cancel out the meanings of the bells  
None that cannot warm the heart in December  
December, December, moving towards the solstice fire even though it is summer in the lands  
of the north  
Fire and fire and the dove nearing  
Fire of the heart’s longing and the fire of appeasement  
All things in celebration of the dove and the bride  
And she is beautiful  
Is all the colours and scents of the world  
Is beautiful more than words can name yet the words must strive again, again  
*Sanctus, Sanctus*, what is it the heart will not embrace?  
It embraces the fire of December  
It embraces the longing and the emptiness when the dove is not near though the dove and the  
bride are always near  
*Sanctus* over the islands of the worlds  
*Sanctus* over the sacred cities  
*Sanctus* forever in the heart and most of all in the heart even before the ringing of the bells.

This day O Lord, let this be the day  
Let this be the moment of transforming fire and charm  
Come as the bride  
Come as the dove  
The bells will ring your entrance into the city where we wait  
And all creation waits  
In breathlessness and expectation  
At Easter and solstice and when the bell is rung  
As it rings now from that Greek Chapel I remember  
As it rang over that morning in Crete when it seemed to be the first morning of the Genesis  
O the heart is never far from that  
It sings and it sings and what does it sing but *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*  
At Easter and winter  
In the absence of the dove  
When only the shadow of the bride crosses the path and the way through the trees is blocked  
Even then  
And never more so than then  
*Sanctus* on the lips as the longed-for prayer  
*Sanctus* as the talisman against the evil of these days  
*Sanctus* in the heart as all it longs for  
*Sanctus* for the coming of the dove

Praise for the bells!  
Praise for the clarity of echoes in the morning!  
Praise for the responding heart!

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*  
All things are preparation for the dove

## CANON

Divinity and history –this is the true story

Divinity embracing the then-blessed earth –this is the second chapter

The rose attests the Rose, the dove attests the Dove, the bride attests the Bride

All things are known in this light –all things are known by this shadow

I give credence to the fluency of water and what it implies

And history not told without the Rose

Light over Ithaca and Aran is the light over Flanders and all, all leads to Jerusalem

Praise for the dove's glide over the harbour at sunset

Sing? What shall I sing? I shall sing creation

Rose, Rose, Rose of all my days –bless this the darkness of absence

And as the sepal wraps the core into its heart so wraps divinity history into itself

And what are the psalms of morning if they are not our longing for the Rose

Bride, grace this bower - Dove, come to this nest

All things in preparation for the rose, all things in preparation for the bride

Sing? What shall I sing but what I am given of the world?

And the shadow of the dove on the water and the waters lapping the sacred islands

And there, at the harbour, the boats with the bright names of our longings

The rose is the core is the bride is the dove

And the first light of morning on the silent harbours where the boats wait

And the stone with its core of legend and fable

And the psalms that cannot be sung but can only be indicated –yes, these also are valid

Sing? What shall I sing but the psalms of longing and expectation?

And the waters of the stories of the world

And the stone yielding....yielding....

It is to the dove that all things yield

All things at morning and evening

When the shadows come upon the harbours of the world such as have come in these the uncertain days

What shall I sing in the winter but what I sing in the spring

Winter, winter, and ice upon the rose but the rose endures

This is the winter and the evening of the world

The high places fall, the towers topple and all raise a bewildered cry to the dove

This the mourning time yet also the time of the dove

Elegies of the harbours reaching over the cities of the world to Flanders, Ithaca, Aran and Jerusalem

It is Jerusalem that sings the song of this day

Singing of exile and longing –and of what else have I sung?- even as the bells of the *Sanctus* fade

Winter, winter, yet the rose endures, the voice rises, the dove descends

There is no season inappropriate to the rose

And what are the words of winter? They are Suffer, Love, Celebrate –and the heart knows no other words

Jerusalem I am your exile and citizen

Yes, divinity and history and Suffer, Love, Celebrate –of what is the heart composed if not of adoration to these names?

I have adored, I have prayed at foreign waters, I have longed for distant harbours

And always, all ways, the dove shadowing the day

Who will not sing his bright bewilderment and not be the better for singing? It is for this, for this, for this that I sing

History, history, what are you but the story of the rose?

The rose nourishes the dark of winter and breaks the ice at the harbour's mouth

Yes, with fire and fire, living so as not to live, dying so as not to die

## AGNUS DEI

*“...and let my cry come unto you....”*

In the darkness and the bitter wind  
In the long hour before the first light  
In the silence that awaits your voice

In the harbours blocked in winter  
In the ice that withers the rose  
In the silence often given as response

In the verb that does not know its origin  
In the language that strikes its own gong  
In the air twisted by the gong and the silence

In the pit of winter and December  
In the cold days before the solstice  
In the absence of what should be given as love

In the boats keeping inshore  
In the captain's distrust of black waters  
In the tides that wash inland and out

Yes, in December  
December and solstice  
Let my cry ring out in the dark

Let Jerusalem reply  
Let Ithaca shudder  
Let the heart bow down and offer a song to sing the anthems of praise and supplication

Therefore this cry  
This cry and all words  
These word and all the languages they issues from

Yes  
Let that cry rise  
Let it be heard

Let it be responded to as only it can if the dove will bless the silence with an answer

## COMMUNION

For which there are no befitting words  
Words are an indication not the essence and it is here that the essence must be told  
But how tell it?  
Say then that the moment was bright with ecstasy  
That is was complete without a past to hinder it  
Say that the heart responded and that was everything and that everything required neither  
clarification nor explanation  
That is was pure in itself

I will be telling this as long as I live  
I will tell it over and over so as to draw nearer to the core which was everything  
That there will not be words enough but that at least I will try  
That the moment will never cease

Words, words, nothing but words  
I live among shadows and approximations

## POST COMMUNION

Everything was aftermath to that moment  
Everything lived in silence and repose  
Everything was total and required no explanation

Not that one will be offered-  
Who can mention perfect silence without betraying the essence?  
Who can tell the aftermath of what cannot be told?

Yet the words persist and demand attention-  
The way the gull did above the harbour  
Who could have been more than a gull and the harbour more than a harbour

I thought of all things in their separate brightness/darkness  
I listened as the bell rang again  
I bowed my head as if at lowly prayer

Yes, all things in the light of that moment  
Nothing absent and nothing foresworn  
Nothing and nothing yet that was everything

The gulls swivelled in air  
It seemed a gesture of total grace that was there to be understood  
It seemed perfect motion and complete in itself

What hold us to that which is beyond ourselves?  
I had no answer at that moment for the moment needed none

To answer would have been to doubt  
And there was no doubting the gull nor the harbour nor the water expert in its flowing

Dreams did not rise  
Longing –longing for continuation, yes, this arose  
But dreams did not rise nor did they need to

The gull was the dove  
Of this I am sure though I can be sure of so little  
But that does not matter

The moment existed in the word '*yielding*'  
I yielded and yielded  
I did not resist the tide flooding the heart and I was thankful

For the gull and the harbour  
For the brightness advancing from the east  
For the mainland coming into view

What will endure if this will not endure?

What tree will survive the pathos of autumn and the pangs of winter?  
What water will outlive the ice?

Nothing will yet everything will

Nothing will cease though all was held in abeyance of the word '*yielding*' as I yielded to  
prolong the sacrament of perfect silence

And that was the lesson-  
That doubt as I might in other moments this moment would endure  
And its core would not be gainsaid

No, it would last and last like the motion of water after a stone fell into it  
That it would outlive the stone and the silence  
And that it would continue with implications to be lived through each morning and each  
season of night

Night? It was nearly dawn  
Soon the bell would ring and the day begin and the harbour shed  
The inactivity of the dark

Already everything was moving towards the moment  
Already the first fire were being lit in stone kitchens  
Already the boats were moving with the tide

And still it continued in the heart  
Still it confirmed that it was without precedent but not aftermath  
That it had begun and would not end

Post-communion –yes, that was the day  
Splendid in the way it moved towards morning  
Splendid with its lights and expectations

## ITA MISSA EST

Ended? What is ended ?  
Light does not end  
Words do not end  
The waves do not end at the turning of the tide

I stood at the harbour  
And while everything spoke of '*aftermath*'  
It was not an ending but a continuation  
In the light approaching Aran

No, light does not end  
The shadows do not speak of finality  
Nor does silence bespeak a silence  
That is infinite and unending

The boats waited for dawn  
The waves were a soft swoosh on the sand  
And if this was an ending  
It was also a foretaste of what would happen

And it did-  
The day yielded into and yielded up another day  
Nothing was ending but beginning  
And what lessons had been learned  
Were there for the taking and were taken

Yes, light on Aran  
Aftermath –and yet a beginning  
That rooted into the waves and the first clouds of morning  
That came with the light as it edged across the sky

I thought of elsewhere  
Of the life beyond the island  
Though there could be/would be no life  
That was not rooted there

Forever taking its verve from the moment when  
One gull neared and landed on the harbour wall

Yes, in such things the heart finds meaning  
Even if they are cast in the light of '*aftermath*'

Aftermath –continuation of the blessed day that came  
With stories of the annunciation  
Subscribe to, held to, affirmed and loved  
There and in the elsewhere of this world

**LAST READING**

There was 'solace' in the air over Aran. It was as tangible as the salt off the waves. Everything, yes everything seemed infinite with possibilities and implications and I knew that no matter what would occur a poem would occur –and it did –the one beginning with occasions of light and which had no visible end

**HYMN**

*'Let us go to the world  
Let us go to the waiting house  
Let us go to the life that waits in abeyance*

*Let us celebrate all the mysteries  
Let us do so with silence and words, rock and stone  
Let us do so without hesitation*

*Come, the world awaits and all must be told and sung  
And all must be celebrated  
Let us go to the waiting houses'*

All ways and always  
In the houses of the world  
The heart cries out with the wildest joy

Suffer          Love          Celebrate