

SYMPHONIC PRAYERS

FOR ORCHESTRA AND  
SOPRANO SOLOIST

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A Dissertation  
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the Temple University Graduate Board

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DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Symphonic Prayers* is a work for orchestra and soprano soloist in four movements. The work uses four poems from Rainer Maria Rilke's collection *Das Stundenbuch* (The Book of Hours), written between 1895 and 1903. Rilke was a Bohemian poet, mystic, traveler, and lover of art and nature. He narrates *The Book of Hours* through a fictional Russian monk who converses with God and reflects upon the nature of the world through the poetry. Rilke's poems delicately weave together the joys and struggles of a faith journey and of finding one's place in the world and in eternity. Equally striking is the beauty with which he utilizes the German language. There is an irresistible rhythm and nuance to his words.

The four poems I chose each reflect a different category of prayer derived from the Christian faith tradition. A common prayer model utilized in the Protestant church is abbreviated by the acronym "ACTS," which stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. The ACTS prayers guide the worshipper through four methods of praying: expressing adoration for God, confessing sins and shortcomings, showing gratitude and thanksgiving, and asking for help for oneself and others. I modeled each movement of *Symphonic Prayers* after these categories and chose poems from *Das Stundenbuch* that mirrored the sentiments of each prayer.

*Adoration* is a proclamation of faith, a statement of unrelenting praise and prayer. The narrator unapologetically declares that even if it begets arrogance, nothing will diminish his drive to reach out to God. Even through this bold statement, the poem maintains reverence and a sense of wonder toward its subject. *Confession* is a statement of the brokenness of the world, recounting how murder has ripped through God's call for

us to love life, and how our attempts to atone for this brokenness fall short. *Thanksgiving* is a boisterous statement of praise to God. The speaker analogizes her praise to trumpet calls, her words to sweet wine, and her music to a northern spring day, each preparing the way for God. *Supplication* returns to the reverence of the first movement. The narrator contemplates her life that is ever circling around God.

The accompanying monograph explains the ACTS prayers in the context of the Reformed Church of America, both historically and currently. It presents an analysis of the four Rilke poems selected to represent the ACTS prayers, including their narrative meaning, their relationship to *Das Stundenbuch*, their translations, and a close examination of their poetic features, such as prosody, meter, and rhyme. The discussion of the poems also required some background on Rilke's faith journey and artistic maturation. The monograph also addresses musical text setting in a broader sense by recounting some historical philosophies of textual and musical relationships and explaining where the composer's ideologies fall within the larger framework. Finally, it presents a musical analysis of *Symphonic Prayers* in relation to the text setting of the four poems, including an explanation of its harmonic structure, which is derived from Olivier Messiaen's modes of limited transposition.

The compositional goal of *Symphonic Prayers* was to create a work that would honor the ACTS prayers through the elegant words of a mystic poet. The music reinforces the messages behind Rilke's honest conversations with God, and in doing so offers a new lens through which to experience the arc of the ACTS prayers.

## DEDICATION

To the God whose presence is manifest in the love of my family

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CONTEXT

Truly to sing takes another kind of breath.  
A breath in the void. A shudder in God. A wind.

–Rainer Maria Rilke (*Sonnets to Orpheus*, Part One, III)  
Translation by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy  
(*In Praise of Mortality*, 71)

Rainer Maria Rilke had a complex relationship with God. His mother brought him along to church for prayer when he was a child (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 17), but he denounced Christianity in his adult life. He did, however, feel a sense of spirituality and divine presence in the world, which kept him from fully disengaging from organized religion. His personal doctrine was that of a love for life itself and a vision of interconnectedness in the world. This interconnectedness, a disintegration of a discrete self and other, is where God was present for Rilke (Louth, 2010, p. 50). Art was Rilke’s religion. His poetry was the lens through which he could contemplate and expound this divine presence that connected all things. Art itself harnessed the sacredness of life. Even though Rilke found fulfillment in writing poetry, he often struggled with finding his place in society. He lived in a tumultuous time, and the hardships he experienced called into question the validity of his vocation. His output almost entirely ceased between 1910-1922, while he was grappling with the horrors of World War I (Leeder & Vilain, 2010, p. 3).

Many artists face these same issues—myself included. I empathize with Rilke in both his spiritual and artistic journeys. I grew up in a faith community that had an untold positive impact on my life, and my moral convictions remain rooted in the Christian faith.

My relationship with God is a continual driving force in the pursuit of a meaningful and worthy life. Like many, though, I struggle to see God's presence in parts of everyday life as well as in the brokenness in the world. Rilke's God, present through all Earthly things and not separate from the darkness of life nor from death itself, resonates with me as a way to reconcile an omnipotent God presiding over a sometimes trite and sometimes ugly world.

As for my own place in such a world, I also sometimes wrestle with my role as a composer and academic. I am undoubtedly following the only career path I have ever desired—I cannot imagine embracing any other vocation with the same fervor. However strong this conviction, it is sometimes difficult to rationalize devoting one's life to music amidst of a world of uncured diseases, soldiers at war, climates in crisis and children in poverty. My rationale for continuing to pursue music ultimately comes back to Rilke's doctrine that life is best lived (and God best seen) when experiencing art. Despite all of the evils in the world, there must be room for good, for humanity, and for the finer things. It was through this creed that I came to the decision to write a work for soprano and orchestra using Rilke's poems and addressed to the God that lives among us. *Symphonic Prayers* is a fusion of the two most important practices in my life: faith and music. Each movement of the work is reflective of one of four categories of prayer used in my reformed church tradition. These four prayer models are re-contextualized through Rilke's poignant words and through my musical interpretation of his conversation with God.

## Compositional Context

While the most significant parameters of this work were the decisions to set Rilke's poems and to use prayer as the form, there were many other influences and decisions that brought me to the final product (several of which preceded the choices of text and form). I knew from the outset that I wanted to include voice in this work. I feel most at home writing for the voice (my primary instrument). In addition to the practical matter of understanding the idiom better as a performer of the instrument, I love writing for voice because of the interplay between text and music. This relationship is what drove my love for this art form from my earliest years. The enhancement (or alteration) of meaning that one form provides for the other is a source of constant fascination to me and drives me to continue writing in this idiom.

My specific interests in the interplay between music and text evolved as I developed as a composer. The culminating works of each of my degree programs were vocal works. My undergraduate senior project and first real large-scale composition was a setting of three poems by Rudyard Kipling for SATB *a cappella* choir. It was a direct outcropping of my love of choral singing and the positive impact that choral experiences had on my musical development. My hope at the time was to write a piece that would be moving to others in the same way that I had been moved by singing the choral music of Verdi, Mozart, Bruckner or Rachmaninoff. My master's thesis was a Mass in honor of St. Francis written for woodwind quintet, SATB choir and soloists. While the general desire to write a work that was moving to an audience remained, the manner in which I hoped to achieve this was considerably different and more multifaceted. As an undergraduate, I focused on writing music purely as a display of beauty and emotion. With my passage

into graduate school, my focus shifted to music without such immediacy, to that which demanded more of its listener and which existed on a more intellectual plane. I immersed myself in the music of Berio, Schwantner, Lutoslawski and Crumb. The two years of my master's degree were certainly my most stylistically experimental. Even through this change, my goal to honor the meaning and sacred nature of the ancient texts of the Mass in my master's thesis remained.

It seemed fitting, then, that my doctoral monograph composition would also involve setting a text. The expansion of instrumentation between successive final projects widened the palette through which I could paint the words of the poetry and musically convey its deeper meaning. The ultimate task of doing so with a full orchestra was both challenging and rewarding. Stylistically, I arrived somewhere between the aesthetic poles of my previous degree programs during my doctoral studies. The pivotal piece during my time at Temple that helped prepare me to write *Symphonic Prayers* was a song cycle for mezzo-soprano and string quartet entitled *Years Later*. It was through this cycle that I found a way to strike a balance between my disparate earlier styles and to fuse the merits of experimentation, intellect and beauty that I seek when composing. Since *Years Later* had such a significant impact on many of my compositional choices for *Symphonic Prayers*, I will conclude this section on compositional context with a brief explanation of *Years Later*.

My work on the cycle spanned a period of over four years (with time away from it between songs). The texts are selections from the manuscript *The Farther Afield We Go* by Penelope Cray, a gifted poet and personal friend. It was not my initial intent to create a song cycle from these texts, but after setting two of the poems for mezzo-soprano and

solo string instrument on separate occasions, I felt there was potential to expand these pieces into a larger, unified work. The first song I composed, *Stone Slivers* for mezzo-soprano and viola, was in collaboration with musicologist and violist Robert Fallon. It would later serve as the catalyst for the structure of the rest of the cycle. In our initial conversations about the piece, Dr. Fallon, a Messiaen scholar, suggested using the modes of limited transposition to derive the harmonic language of the song. He had also recently published an article in *Die Bratsche: Newsletter of the Philadelphia Viola Society* in which he discussed the viola's versatility as both a "blue" and a "green" instrument: on one hand, viola repertoire tends to portray sadness, melancholy and despair, and on the other, it is used for pastoral and folk themes (Fallon, 2005). I was happy to use Dr. Fallon's research interests as parameters for my compositional planning in an effort to make the piece more truly collaborative, so I set out to combine pastoral and melancholy themes under the umbrella of the modes of limited transposition.

Two years later, while participating in the Brevard Summer Music Festival, I composed another song using one of Cray's poems, this time for mezzo-soprano and cello. I used another mode of limited transposition (the octatonic scale). After completing these two songs as independent works, it occurred to me that they would pair well, and I decided to expand them into a cycle of eight songs for string quartet that would feature various subsets of the quartet with the singer (another nod to Messiaen and his *Quartet for the End of Time*). I used the tonal ambiguity created by the symmetry in the modes to juxtapose the pastoral tropes and the darker, more elegiac themes in Cray's poetry. I discovered that the modes blended my previously segregated uses of tonality and atonality. The song cycle helped to ground me in a more consistent harmonic language. It

also developed my sense of the relationship between the ensemble and the singer and the ways in which the string quartet could provide another level of narrative to the singer's words.

It seemed a logical progression to move from a chamber work of this nature to a work for orchestra and soprano. *Symphonic Prayers* also utilizes the modes of limited transposition (which I will discuss in a subsequent chapter). I applied the techniques I gleaned from writing the song cycle when I set Rilke's text in this same harmonic language. I also used certain sonorities to symbolize various elements of the poetry in both works. Writing a song cycle with string quartet laid the groundwork for writing a work for voice and orchestra. Navigating the relationships between the instruments of the quartet with the singer helped give me a better understanding of the potential for expansion to an orchestra with a singer. Compositionally, *Years Later* was a necessary step toward my approaches in *Symphonic Prayers*. With systems of harmony and text setting in place from my previous work, the other parameter to incorporate was the element of prayer. What follows will contextualize my thematic decisions for the work.

### Liturgical Context

In keeping with a tradition spanning back to the earliest known function of music, *Symphonic Prayers* is a sacred work intended as a communication with God. The prayer structure is drawn from my Protestant faith tradition in the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In the same way that my compositional decisions for *Symphonic Prayers* were a summation of many earlier musical influences and experiences, my thematic and extra-musical ideas for the work stemmed from my religious upbringing and a lifelong connection between faith and music (particularly prayer and music). I wanted to honor

my faith heritage in this work. To do so, I had to consider the role and meaning of the four prayer categories in the church as well as the significance of reinterpreting them through Rilke's words and my music. I examined two facets of the RCA tradition to discern these matters: first, the evolution and current state of music as a vehicle of prayer in the church and second, the function of the categories of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication as prayers.

A prominent doctrine of the RCA is that the church is "reformed and always reforming, earnestly seeking to know the mind of Christ as it strives to be faithful in a changing, complex, and often troubled world" (Reformed Church in America [RCA], 2013a). The church acknowledges the need to adapt in an ever-evolving culture and society, and has applied this doctrine to both its mission and its music. This was evident as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Known in North America as the Dutch Reformed Church at this time, the music of the church underwent rapid change when the arrival of singing schools in local communities eventually introduced English hymnody to the service (Tripold, 2012, xv). The primary composer of hymnody was Isaac Watts, who composed over 700 hymns, among them "Joy to the World" (Marini, 2003). Watts was also a theologian and philosopher, and later I will illustrate how his writings played a significant role in the development of *Symphonic Prayers*.

The addition of hymnody to the service broke a 150-year tradition of strict psalmody and use of the *Genevan Psalter* dating back to the original Calvinist reformed theology in the Netherlands (Tripold, 2012, xvi). Hymnody also came at a time when the church felt a need for an English Psalm-book as English supplanted Dutch as the dominant language of its parishioners. Minutes from a Synod meeting in 1787 include

calls for English-speaking ministers as well as the following on Psalmody (with original punctuation):

The Rev. Body, convinced of the necessity for another and better version of the Psalms of David, than the congregations as yet possess in the English language, which is continually increasing in our churches, to be used for their benefit In public worship, (no congregation, however, to be obliged thereto, where that of the New York Consistory is in use,) have determined as speedily as possible to form such a new versification out of other collections of English Psalms in repute and received in the Reformed churches. (Hastings, 1905, p. 4345)

This clearly shows the willingness of the Synod (the governing body of the church) to adapt its music to fit the changing climate. A new psalm book was subsequently introduced and coexisted with new English hymns. Increasing numbers of hymns nearly engulfed psalmody over the next 80 years, after which the arrival of a new wave of Dutch immigrants revived psalm singing (Kansfield, 1987). Both are still used in the present day.

The evolution of music in the church is still relevant today. The RCA maintains a Commission on Christian Worship, whose official responsibilities entail that they “recommend standards for worship music... The commission informs the church of current development in liturgics, hymnody, and other worship resources with appropriate critique” (RCA, 2013b). In 1996, the Commission on Worship released a paper entitled *The Theology and Place of Music in Worship*, which remains published on the RCA website (RCA, 2013c). It reflects upon the changing role of music in our technological age and offers guidelines for evaluating and selecting music for worship (a fascinating modern-day version of other often-studied councils on music). While the paper primarily

addressed congregational singing, several statements were of a more general nature. An excerpt from their introductory paragraphs states that:

The church also has greater access and has shown greater openness to a greater variety of music—from classical hymnody to Christian rock, from European cantatas to South African choruses. Such diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated; it reflects the diversity and richness of God’s creation. (RCA, 2013c, para. 3)

Like their predecessors in 1787, the 1996 Commission embraced modernization by welcoming various genres of music into the body of the church. However, it is still clear that singing and text are of the utmost importance. In their subsequent reflections, some ideals remain very true to the original Calvinist theology:

God can be glorified by beautiful sounds and spirits may be uplifted by a pleasing melody, but it is primarily the joining of the tune to a text that gives meaning to Christians' songs. Not only should both text and tune glorify God and be consistent with each other, but the tune must serve the text. (RCA, 2013c, para. 10)

While *Symphonic Prayers* is intended for a concert hall and not a worship service, it is nonetheless meant to serve as four prayers to God. Perhaps it instead brings a worshipful component to the concert experience. However defined, I hoped it would add to the diverse body of modern sacred music embraced by the church. Later I will discuss the ways in which I ultimately agree with the above Reformed theology on the relationship between text and music and how this is reflected in *Symphonic Prayers*.

Finally, there were two statements in the paper that directly related to the categories of prayer I employed in *Symphonic Prayers*. The first, quoting Calvin’s *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, says:

The emotional power of music, rightly employed, is a vital and moving aid to worship. Music, quite apart from an associated text, is capable of evoking powerful emotions... Calvin recognized the emotional power of

music and for that reason included the singing (rather than the saying) of Psalms in the church in Geneva. Such singing "lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our heart to a true zeal and eagerness to pray." Music can indeed "excite piety," and depending on its mood, move individuals to penitence, thanksgiving, adoration, love, or any one of a host of emotions. (RCA, 2013c, para. 13)

Later, in their guidelines for congregational singing, the Commission posits the following questions for congregational leaders to consider:

Is there sufficient pastoral breadth in our music ministry? Do we sing songs that are appropriate to the many and variable life situations in which believers find themselves? Does our congregational singing include the many moods and types of prayer, including praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament, intercession, and dedication? (RCA, 2013c, para. 16)

These "many moods and types of prayer" are listed in various combinations and with various substitutions both in this particular document and throughout the doctrines of the RCA and other Christian traditions. The RCA defines prayer as a "conversation with God. In prayer we talk to God, we listen to God, and we receive the gift of communion with God. In prayer we bring praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and intercession to God" (RCA, 2013d). A common prayer model that utilizes four of these terms is the acronym "ACTS," which stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. The term supplication is often used interchangeably with the term intercession. The acronym guides the worshipper through four methods of prayer: expressing adoration for God, confessing sins and shortcomings, showing gratitude and thanksgiving, and asking for help for oneself and others.

The ACTS acronym and these general prayer categories pervade the Protestant vocabulary, but exactly when and from whom the acronym developed is (to my knowledge) unknown. The use of these terms dates back to the earliest days of the

church. My best estimation is that Isaac Watts played a key role in their codification with his 1715 document *A Guide To Prayer* (or, *A Free and Rational Account of the Gift, Grace and Spirit of Prayer; with Plain Directions How Every Christian May Attain Them*). He methodically defines, categorizes, and problematizes prayer and offers various methods of how to pray (Watts, 1816). The document saw much success and, according to the *British Museum Catalog*, was republished a number of times over a 100-year span (Gravlee & Irvine, 1973, p. 464). The first chapter, *The Nature of Prayer*, divides prayer into the following categories: Invocation, Adoration, Confession, Petition, Pleading, Self Dedication, Thanksgiving, and Blessing (Watts, 1816, p. 15). Three of the four ACTS prayers are named outright, and once more, the category of Supplication, is replaced with a synonym: Petition. According to Watts (1816), each prayer requires a number of components. Graylee and Irvine (1973) summarize them nicely:

*Adoration* involves ways of expressing admiration and reverence for God, praising the attributes of God, praising the creations of God, and expressing God's relationship to humans; *Confession* involves methods of communicating the low station of mortals in relation to God, our confessions of sin, our need for punishment and our unworthiness of mercy, and our wants and sorrows; *Petition* includes methods of communicating our "desire of deliverance from evil" and methods of requesting the goods we seek (pp. 17-22); ... *Thanksgiving* involves communicating the benefits provided by God without request and those which were in answer to prayer. (Gravlee & Irvine, 1973, p. 466)

These definitions are in keeping with what I know these prayers to mean in today's church. They do not connote a specific prayer or text, only the sentiment that the text should express to God. This leaves the worshipper (or the church) to find the right words or music to ascribe to the prayer. In the spirit of "reformed and always reforming," the goal of *Symphonic Prayers* was to create a work that would honor the ACTS prayers

in a new way: through the words of a Bohemian mystic poet. The music paints a picture behind Rilke's elegant and honest conversations with God, and in doing so offers a new lens through which to experience the arc of the ACTS prayers.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE POETRY

Charged with the task of finding poetry that would convey the nature of the ACTS prayers, I pored over the works of dozens of poets and religious writers. Although derived from my own faith tradition, I felt compelled to use poetry over Bible verses or psalms because I wanted to convey these prayers through a more universal text. Since this piece is designed for a concert setting, I wanted the words to resonate with audience members of any faith or creed and not just those who follow Christianity. As for the poetry itself, I searched for poems that had a level of elevated language appropriate for a conversation with God, but not to the extent that it obscured the human nature of the prayer. The poetry had to contain a cadence and rhythm that would lend itself to song, but I did not want one that was overly metrical or formulaic. I wanted the poetry to function on both a literal and a symbolic level so that I could wrestle with layers of meaning in the music. After reading Rilke, I knew I had found the right text. He is a masterful craftsman, and his honest conversation with God in *The Book of Hours* was exactly the vehicle through which I could adapt the ACTS prayers.

#### Rilke and *Das Stundenbuch*

René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was born in Prague and later described his youth as an “anxious, heavy childhood” (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 15). His parents did not nurture him well. Before René was born, his mother had suffered the loss of a daughter mere days after the birth. She projected this loss onto young Rilke by dressing him in girls’ clothing for the first six years of his life. She brought him with her to church and would oblige him to kiss Christ’s wounds on the crucifix. His father

aspired to a military career but never escaped working for the railroad. Instead he shipped René off to military school at age 10 (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 15), another source of anguish in René's youth. His classmates ridiculed him for the effeminate clothing that his mother supplied for him. This challenging childhood contributed to his desire to break family ties and reestablish his identity as soon as he was old enough. His youthful devotion to Catholicism would soon be replaced with devotion to art, and he would spend a lifetime trying to reconcile these two forces in his life.

*Das Stundenbuch* (The Book of Hours) was the first work that Rilke considered part of his mature output, though his prior writings were extensive. Notable among the works preceding *Das Stundenbuch* is a cycle of poems entitled *Visions of Christ*, a pivotal work in Rilke's artistic and philosophical maturation. He completed the cycle between 1896-1898 (Rilke, 1959/1967, p. 3), a year before commencing *Das Stundenbuch* in 1899. *Visions of Christ* was not published during his lifetime; he felt it was too revealing of his innermost thoughts and would be too controversial to share with the public (Rilke, 1959/1967, p. 11). He shared it only with trusted mentors and colleagues. Prominent among them was Lou Andreas-Salomé, a woman fifteen years his senior, who was also a confidante of Nietzsche. Her essay "Jesus de Jude" (Jesus the Jew) incorporated many of the same ideas implied in *Visions of Christ*, namely the perception of Christ as man and not as God (Rilke, 1959/1967, p. 25). Lou became a mentor, artistic kindred spirit, and briefly a lover to Rilke. It was at her suggestion that René changed his name to the more masculine Rainer. She also exposed him to the work of Nietzsche, whose philosophies became entwined with Rilke's thoughts on religion, the self, and Christ (Rilke, 1959/1967, p. 39).

*Visions of Christ* provides insight into Rilke's positions within the culture of the *fin de siècle* and the formation of the ideologies that would shape *Das Stundenbuch*. In an introductory essay to the 1967 English translation, editor Siegfried Mandel writes:

Often the period of emancipation and the efforts to achieve an autonomy of personality and spirit are painful; but when an artist's early upbringing is saturated with piety, ...his complicated personal experience must find an outlet, if not resolution, in his writings. Evidences of clarifying tumultuous ideas and of sifting autobiographical scenes, attempts to formulate concepts, and technical experimentations in the harness of talent are apparent in Rilke's *Visions of Christ*... (Rilke, 1959/1967, p. 3)

Upon releasing himself from Catholic dogma, Rilke was left to ascertain how to place his still strong sense of a divine presence in the world. The religiosity he developed during and after writing *Visions of Christ* included a perception of Jesus as man and not as God (and a self-identification with Jesus as man), a direct connection to God without Christ as intermediary, a belief in spiritualism and in an unseen connection between all things, and art as a path to realizing this spirituality. In a letter to the philosopher Karl Baron Du Prel in 1897, Rilke articulates his sense of spiritualism and the role of art within that realm:

Apart from the charm of the mysterious, the domains of spiritualism have for me an important power of attraction because in the recognition of the many idle forces and in the subjugation of their power I see the great liberation of our remote descendants and believe that in particular every artist must struggle through the misty fumes of crass materialism to those spiritual intimations that build for him the golden bridge into shoreless eternities ... it will perhaps be vouchsafed me sometime to become with word and pen one of the adherents of the new faith that towers high above church-steeple crosses and shines like the first hint of morning on the princeliest peaks... it seems to me that in my "Visions of Christ," appearing this year, I shall come a big step nearer to your group. (Rilke, 1945, p. 25)

This letter illustrates how Rilke was coming to define works of art and poetry as a “new faith” and felt *Visions of Christ* approached such a domain.

He would continue to hone this philosophy in *Das Stundenbuch* as he reconciled his new ideals with his upbringing. Spiritualism proved to be a great positive force for Rilke, steering him from religious disillusionment toward a brighter outlook on life. In a lengthy letter to his close friend Ellen Kay in 1903, Rilke recounts the state of his spiritual journey and personal creed:

I love life, and I believe in it! Everything in me believes in it. You have felt that my letters lie in the shadow of some bitter sorrow, and that is why there are in your last letter those beautiful, good, bell-pure words affirming life. As a child, when everyone was always unkind to me, when I felt so infinitely forsaken, so utterly astray in an alien world, there may have been a time when I longed to be gone. But then, when people remained alien to me, I was drawn to things, and from them a joy breathed upon me, a joy in being that has always remained equally quiet and strong and in which there was never a hesitation or a doubt. In the military school, after long fearful battles, I abandoned the violent Catholic piety of childhood, made myself free of it in order to be even more, even more comfortlessly alone; but from things, from their patient bearing and enduring, a new, greater and more devout love came to me later, some kind of faith that knows no fear and no bounds. In this faith life is also a part. Oh, how I believe in it, in life. Not that which makes up our time, but that other, the life of little things, the life of animals and of the great plains. (Rilke, 1945, pp. 102-103)

Rilke’s zealous change of heart and affirmation of life coincided with the completion of *Visions of Christ* and a subsequent journey to Russia with Lou that would result in the conception of the first book of *Das Stundenbuch*. Rilke felt a strong connection to Russian culture, landscape, art, and architecture (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 19). He felt spiritually at home and artistically inspired there. He wrote to his friend Frieda von Bülow while in St. Petersburg and told her that he felt closer to discovering true self-

expression: “And I feel in these days that *Russian* things will give me the names for those most timid devoutnesses of my nature which, since my childhood, have been longing to enter into my art” (Rilke, 1945, p. 32). His “timid devoutnesses” later entered his art through the voice of Apostol, a Russian monk and the protagonist of *Das Stundenbuch*.

The first of the three books in *Das Stundenbuch*, *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben* (The Book of Monastic Life) was originally titled *Die Gebete* (The Prayers). It is modeled after a devotional prayer book “intended to accompany the lay person through the canonical hours of the day” (Louth, 2010, p. 49). Apostol is a monk who paints icons, underscoring Rilke’s fusion of art with the divine (Louth, 2010, p. 49). In an early draft of the book, Rilke included a letter from Apostol to the Metropolitan (the Eastern Church’s highest-ranking official) that reflects on art and God (Rilke, 1905/2001, xiii). In the letter and indeed throughout *The Book of Monastic Life*, the relationship between the monk and God, between the self and the other, is fluid. God is not exempt from the interconnectedness of Rilke’s world and is therefore equally impacted by human will. Apostol (and Rilke) felt that God relied on human art to communicate with the masses as much as the masses relied on God’s presence in their lives (Rilke, 1905/2001, xv). Rilke saw this as a symbiotic relationship between God and humankind and not as irreverence for God. God stood for oneness between all things—a totality of life and an indistinction between self and other (Louth, 2010, p. 50). He felt that both God and art were constantly forming and that the unfolding of one equally impacted the other, as evident in another letter in which he says of the Russian people, “that their God (who is not yet completed) and their art (which is not yet completed) are steadily unfolding side by side in mutual influence” (Rilke, 1905/2001, xv).

Rilke wrote the second book, *Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft* (The Book of Pilgrimage) in September of 1901, two years after *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben*. Inspired by a second trip to Russia with Lou in 1900, the focus of this book shifts from art and icon to physical places in Russia and the Ukraine (Rilke, 1905/2001, xvi). Rilke felt he had found a new homeland in Russia and considered his return a pilgrimage. The Pechersk monastery in Kiev was of particular interest and played a central role in the monk's observations in *The Book of Pilgrimage*. In this set of poems Apostol is concerned with adequately absorbing and appreciating his surroundings in order to see God (Rilke, 1905/2001, xviii).

The third book, *Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode* (The Book of Poverty and Death) shifts considerably in tone from the previous books. Rilke wrote this final installment in 1903 after another two-year gap. During this time he had moved to Paris after receiving a commission to write a monograph on Auguste Rodin. Rilke hated urban life, especially compared to the quiet and contemplative life he lived in Russia. He was also profoundly affected by the poverty he witnessed in the city. In a letter to Lou in June of 1903, he wrote of his time in Paris: "The city was against me, opposed to my life, and like a test I failed. Her cry that never stopped broke into my quiet, her horror followed me into my sad living room, and my eyes lay heavy under the images of her days" (Rilke, 1905/2001, xxi). He overcame this despair in *The Book of Poverty and Death* in the form of a Nietzschean *Übermensch* who, in contrast to the eternal life promised in Christ, promised the perfect Death. Apostol views him as a counterpart who allows people to die with dignity and without pain and suffering. Echoes of interconnectedness from the first two books return in the form of poverty. The poor now represent the same God that once

existed through art, and the monk celebrates God's presence amongst them (Rilke, 1905/2001, xxii).

#### Four Selected Poems

There are 135 poems contained in the three books of *Das Stundenbuch*. Together they form a cohesive narrative and tell a complex story. To draw only four poems from this collection was a challenging task. Any artist who creates a derivative work must consider a number of factors before reinterpreting someone else's art. One such consideration concerns the extent to which the original work will (or will not) be preserved. While I did not alter the poems that I chose, I was keenly aware that Rilke considered each book in *Das Stundenbuch* to be a single, continuous work. For obvious practical reasons, I would not be able to preserve the cohesion of all 67 poems in *The Book of Monastic Life* or all 34 poems of *The Book of Pilgrimage* in my work. This meant that the context of each poem would change, and the relationship between the poems would be re-formed based on their placement in *Symphonic Prayers*. Each poem would also hold more autonomy as one of four rather than one of 135, and their narrative quality as Apostol's words would be lost. For my purposes, these were alterations that still aligned with the scope of my work as a set of more universal and contemplative prayers. I did not intend for my work to embody the whole of *Das Stundenbuch*, rather I sought to use four distinct snapshots of the work as a catalyst in the execution of a separate artistic communication with God.

When selecting each poem, the principal criteria were that they thematically aligned with the category of prayer they were to represent and that they contained a certain level of autonomy—that is, that their meaning was not overly obscured by

removing them from their context within *Das Stundenbuch*. These criteria narrowed my search considerably. The poems in *The Book of Pilgrimage* often reference a place or sometimes a person or religious figure. Such references limit the meaning of the prayer if the listener is unfamiliar with or cannot relate to the reference. For example, the eighth poem begins, “*Und meine Seele ist ein Weib vor dir. Und ist wie der Naemi Schnur, wie Ruth,*” which translates to “And my soul is a woman in your sight. And is like Ruth, who wed Naomi’s son” (Rilke, 1905/1961, p. 93). The poem continues to describe the relationship between the two women, presuming the reader is familiar with the biblical story of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. Without knowledge of this reference, a significant understanding of the poem is lost. Additionally, *The Book of Pilgrimage* contains detailed descriptions that sometimes reveal the era in which the poems are set (by referencing a horse-drawn carriage, for example), which also limits the extent to which a modern listener can truly identify with the poem. For these reasons, I did not select any poems from *The Book of Pilgrimage*.

Three of the four poems I selected for *Symphonic Prayers* came from *The Book of Monastic Life*, and the fourth from *The Book of Poverty and Death*. Interestingly, the poem I chose for the prayer of Thanksgiving (the most joyous of all the prayers) was from *The Book of Poverty and Death*. It is undoubtedly a poem of praise. The jubilation and excitement of the narrator is unaltered by context; however, the presumed subject of the poem is drastically altered. Out of context, this narration of praise (replete with trumpets, joyful shouts, music and sweet spring) is presumably directed at God. This presumption is accurate within the context of my prayer of Thanksgiving. Within *The Book of Poverty and Death*, however, the subject of praise is *not* God, but the

*Übermensch* Angel of Death figure. The narrator praises him as a welcome relief to the suffering of humankind. The praise in the poem prepares the way for Death that, in this case, is celebrated and not feared. This understanding of the poem was critical to how I would set it in a different context (see Appendix A for the text and translation).

The three remaining poems came from *The Book of Monastic Life*. This book is the most reverent of the three—it has a more singular emphasis on the divine than the subsequent books (which incorporate places and people). The language and rhythm Rilke uses in this book also more closely resemble conventional prayers. The three selected poems are the second, ninth and twelfth in the chronology of the book and are presented in reverse order in *Symphonic Prayers*. The twelfth poem serves as the prayer of Adoration and first movement of the work (see Appendix A). This poem is also a poem of praise, but the affect is markedly different from the boisterous praises in the prayer of Thanksgiving. It expresses both admiration and reverence for God, which aligns with Watts's parameters for a prayer of adoration mentioned earlier. The narrator pledges to unapologetically praise and acknowledge God with her whole being. There is an earnest and serious nature to her pledge, perhaps even a degree of urgency as she dedicates herself to this endeavor. The final stanza of the poem illustrates the reverence of her praise: “*Und ist das Hoffahrt, so lass mich hoffärtig sein/ für mein Gebet,/ das so ernst und allein/ vor deiner wolkigen Stirne steht*” (And if this should be arrogance, so let me arrogant be/ to justify my prayer/ that stands so serious and so alone/ before your forehead, circled by the clouds) (Rilke, 1905/1983, p. 7).

The ninth poem, used for the prayer of Confession, contains another biblical reference. The narrator speaks of humankind's failings to live out God's call, particularly

with regard to murder. The poem references the book of Genesis and the story of Cain and Abel. The first line, “*Ich lese es heraus aus deinem Wort*” (I read it here in your very word) (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 40) points toward the Bible by using *Wort* (Word). Later in the poem, the line “*Doch vor dem ersten Tode kam der Mord*” (Yet before the first death came murder) refers to Cain murdering Abel in the book of Genesis. While the allusion is unmistakable to anyone familiar with the story, the overall message that humans have forsaken God’s name by murdering one another is still clear even without knowledge of the biblical reference. Without directly naming the brothers in the poem, its universality is preserved. The reference to Cain and Abel is confirmed in *The Book of Monastic Life* when the succeeding poem begins “*Der blasse Abelknabe spricht*” (The pale Abel speaks). This confirmation is lost when the poem is stated autonomously, but preserving the broader meaning of the poem as a confession of sin and a statement of the shortcomings of humanity rather than its context or references was more relevant to its function as a prayer of Confession.

The last movement of *Symphonic Prayers* is the prayer of Supplication, which uses the second poem in the *Book of Hours*. In the context of the book, the poem is setting the tone and establishing the narrative of the larger work. Rather than speaking directly to God, this poem is more introspective. The narrator speaks of her ever-expanding quest to reach God and in doing so ponders her place in life (See Appendix A). There is an elegant simplicity to this poem. While the narrator is not asking God for anything directly (as one would expect in a prayer of supplication), she implies that she seeks to be closer to God and to have a better understanding of her purpose in the world.

In this way the poem re-frames the prayer as a statement of a desire rather than a request that God fulfill the desire.

The nature of communication between the narrator and God shifts throughout *The Book of Hours*. The narrator sometimes prays directly to God, sometimes prays by speaking about God, and sometimes does not mention God at all in prayer. While the trajectory is not linear in *The Book of Hours*, it moves from the direct to the more general in *Symphonic Prayers*. The prayer of Adoration addresses God directly, using the words “you” and “your,” and most clearly “*mein Gott*” (my God) in the text (see Appendix A). The prayer of Confession does not use the unambiguous “*mein Gott*” but continues to use “you” to address God. The prayer of Thanksgiving no longer addresses God directly, but still refers to God with the opening line “*Ich will ihn preisen*” (I want to praise him) (Rilke, 1905/2001, p. 179) and focuses on ways to praise and prepare for God. Finally, in the prayer of Supplication, the narrator does not mention God until the second stanza, and the action of the poem is built around the narrator’s journey toward God rather than on God himself. In this way, the focus of the prayers zooms out over the course of the work.

#### Matters of Translation

While I altered the chronology and context of these four poems for *Symphonic Prayers*, I preserved their original German language. Many people have translated Rilke’s work into various languages over the years, and as a non-German speaker I was reliant on English translations for a fuller understanding of the poems. I considered setting an English translation rather than the original German. While my native English may have been easier to set and also easier for the (likely) English-speaking audience to

interpret, in the end I could not make this concession. *Symphonic Prayers* adheres to the original German in order to fully preserve the nuance and beauty of Rilke's words.

It is an unfortunate impossibility to translate any poem without sacrificing some component of its meaning. I consulted several translations and also attempted my own rather insufficient translation while analyzing Rilke's poems, and none were exactly the same. The inexact nature of translation exists in any linguistic circumstance, but is especially problematic in poetry, where every word is deliberate and implies more than its ostensible meaning. The authors of nearly every translation I read felt compelled to discuss this challenge in the front matter of their translations. A.L. Peck (1905/1961) writes at length about the limitations of translation, including which components of the poetry he felt were most important to preserve and how he attempted to do so. According to Peck, there are four poetic features that the translator must consider: the sense of the original words, the meter, the rhyme, and "the poetry itself, the music, the whole atmosphere" (Rilke, 1905/1961, p. 10). It is rare that all four elements transfer between languages, and impossible for all of them to transfer at the same time. This leaves the translator to decide where to make concessions and how to preserve as much as possible.

Peck holds his fourth consideration (the poetry itself) in the highest regard, and declares that conceding rhyme and meter is sometimes necessary, though he seems to favor preserving meter over rhyme. He writes: "The translator must never let rhyme, important as it is, hold an absolute domination, for it can quickly lead him into awkward situations ... Rilke's metre is nearly always lucidly clear in the *Stunden-buch*; and failure to reproduce this lucidity would be a serious blemish" (Rilke, 1905/1961, pp. 10-12). He ponders whether Rilke would have chosen the same meter had he been writing in

English, and whether the meter of the German is ultimately still the most appropriate choice for an English translation (Rilke, 1905/1961, p. 10). Peck's painstaking efforts to provide a true impression of Rilke's poems are apparent. His larger aim as a translator parallels my aim as a composer setting a text:

To convey the whole sum and total of these qualities is here, as it always is, impossible: translators are always liable to the accusation of being traitors, and traitors they will certainly be when translating Rilke unless they dare also to some extent to be creators; and this, though a dangerous undertaking, is an essential part of the venture if it is to attain any real measure of success." (Rilke, 1905/1961, p. 9)

A more recent translation is a centenary edition of *Das Stundenbuch* translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy. They also address the challenges of translation and explain their methodologies, which differ considerably from Peck's. They sought to convey the seriousness of Rilke's words by placing them in a more contemporary language and using a modern American poetic style (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 34). They felt that the rhythmic iambic tetrameter and the ABAB rhyme schemes that Rilke often used in *Das Stundenbuch* would have been too "singsong" for today's reader, and therefore were compelled to honor the musicality of Rilke's verse through other means, such as alliteration, sound repetition, internal rhyme and assonance (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 34). When the alliteration or the rhyme scheme of the German was easily transferable to English, they retained it, but not at the expense of the deeper or metaphoric meaning of the poem. In fact, to them, the metaphoric took precedence over the literal:

We chose at times to be faithful to the metaphoric, rather than the literal, meaning of the text, where the literal in English was clumsy or even absurd. ... For instance, God says "*Gib mir Geward*," literally "Give me clothing." We translated this, "Embody me," to convey the task we are to perform for God in the world. (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 37)

They made similar departures with regard to spacing and line breaks. While Rilke's lines are mostly end-stopped, they used enjambment to help display "the open and groping nature of Rilke's thought" (Rilke, 1905/2005, p. 38). This deeper departure from the original is a risky endeavor. They did indeed come under fire by some reviewers for the liberties they took. One particularly scathing review says:

The term 'translation' can only be used in the most casual sense for in their notes on translation Barrows and Macy describe a kind of vague new-age method of translation consisting of a kind of collaboration between them and the original, full of interpretation and subjectivity (pg. 35). ... Any legitimate and reputable translator would be horrified by these hackneyed techniques. (March, 2005)

As Peck stated over forty years earlier, they dared to be creators in their translation and therefore risked accusations of poetic treason. While I take exception to some of their methods (primarily that they occasionally omitted lines of the poem from their translation), I did gain a deeper understanding of these poems by reading their more subjective and modernized translation, especially when read alongside a more straightforward version.

I have discussed only two of the twelve translations that I read, and many more exist. The sheer number and variety of translations in print illustrates the endless and ultimately impossible task of truly transmitting Rilke's poetic artistry into another language. This was the deciding factor in setting the original German. By familiarizing myself with a number of translations published across a wide span of time, I hoped to absorb some of the depth of Rilke's words and gain a deeper sense of the nuance of the German text. I do not feign a comprehensive understanding of the poems, but after living with the German words and studying the painstaking decisions of a variety of linguistic

and poetic experts, I felt prepared to convey what these poems meant to me through a musical setting.

## CHAPTER 3

### TREATING THE TEXT

Much like the translators of these texts, I faced the formidable task of musically weaving my own artistic voice through these poems and prayers. After the painstaking process of planning the piece and finding the text, the compositional work began in earnest with how to set the text. There are numerous matters to consider when setting a text, which I addressed by adhering to a set of principles with regard to the relationship between text and music. This is not to say that I sat down and wrote a personal manifesto on text setting; I have established these principles over my years of singing, studying and writing vocal music. When tasked with composing a large-scale vocal work that held such personal significance, however, it was useful to think conscientiously through my positions on text setting and examine the long lineage of composers whose philosophies on this matter affected the development of vocal music (and subsequently my own compositional development). The decisions regarding the practical musical matters of text setting become clearer when adhering to a larger set of compositional principles.

#### Philosophy

The manner in which music and text interact has sparked debate for centuries. Composers in both the sacred and secular realms have espoused varying principles and methodologies regarding text setting for hundreds of years. While there are those who have used text in a more abstract sense—for its phonetic quality or purely as a method of transmitting vocal sounds (as in Luciano Berio's *Sequenza III* for voice)—the goal of the majority of composers who join text and music is to transmit, enhance, or alter the meaning and significance of the words and the music through their interaction with one

another. This goal is mostly universal, but composers and institutions have historically held varying opinions regarding exactly how it should be met.

In the religious realm, where text functions as part of a worship service or prayer, intelligibility has always been of the utmost importance. As previously discussed, the Calvinist view is that music should inspire piety and serve entirely to enhance the message of the text. Calvin cautioned in his *Institutes of Christian Religion* that music ought not to detract focus from the text or exist for simple enjoyment. He writes:

We must, however, carefully beware, lest our ears be more intent on the music than our minds on the spiritual meaning of the words. . . . If moderation is used, there cannot be a doubt that the practice is most sacred and salutary. On the other hand, songs composed merely to tickle and delight the ear are unbecoming the majesty of the Church, and cannot but be most displeasing to God. (Calvin, 1536/1989, p. 718)

The Catholic Church echoed this sentiment 26 years later during the Council of Trent. The 1562 statement on music says: “Let them keep away from the churches compositions in which there is an intermingling of the lascivious or impure, whether by instrument or by voice” (Burkholder, Grout &, Palisca, 2006, p. 227). In addition, the widely understood musical outcome of the Council of Trent was the restriction of polyphonic music that obscured the intelligibility of the text (and subsequently inspired a new style of polyphony championed by Palestrina).

I agree that text should always remain intelligible so that its full meaning may be transmitted. This was a guiding principle in my orchestrational choices for *Symphonic Prayers*. Particularly when working with an orchestra, careful decisions must be made to prevent the orchestra from overpowering the singer. I labored over choices of texture and register to ensure that the voice would carry and be heard over the instruments. I also

carefully considered the soprano's tessitura in relation to individual words in the text, knowing that certain phonemes, particularly vowels, are less clear in some registers than others. I will discuss this further in the section on text setting.

The church's call to preserve the sacred message of the text by showing emotional restraint in the music has seen both opposition and evolution since these doctrines were set in place some 450 years ago. At the same time that Palestrina was writing masterful examples of restrained church masses, Orlando di Lasso advocated emotional expression and musical text depiction in both sacred and secular music (Burkholder et al., 2006, p. 235). Lasso's versatile output had a lasting impact on the tradition of text setting and musical expression, one that was influential to his Protestant successors (including Bach) for years to come. The modern Protestant church is now accepting of the idea that the emotional power inherent in music itself (separate from text) can be just as worthy a way to connect to God (see excerpt from RCA doctrine on p. 10 above). I am most certainly a product of this modern philosophy, and *Symphonic Prayers* uses a full palette of musical expression to connect the audience to the text and engage in a conversation with God. The manner in which musical expression relates to the text is another topic altogether, one that has also been contested throughout history. It is worth mentioning a few historical moments that helped codify ideologies of poetic and musical expression since they are still so relevant to modern composition (including my own).

The immensely influential Italian madrigals of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reflected the humanist movement of the Renaissance and joined music with poetry in a new genre of expressive secular art (Burkholder et al., 2006, p. 240). Madrigalists used music as a vehicle to propel the drama and characterize the affect and imagery of the poems they set.

Zarlino and Willaert developed methodologies for musical expression derived from the Petrarchan movement in poetry (Burkholder et al., 2006, p. 246). Willaert translated the sweetness or harshness of Petrarch's poetic verse into corresponding sweet or harsh intervals, and Zarlino's famous treatise *Le Istitutioni harmoniche* (The Harmonic Foundations) codified how to use these intervals to evoke particular emotions (Burkholder et al., 2006, p. 248). Fifty years later, Monteverdi established a new 17<sup>th</sup>-century approach, the *seconda practica*, which departed from Zarlino's rules in favor of using whatever musical means necessary to depict the text (Burkholder et al., 2006, p. 296). It is noteworthy that while their methodologies differed, the goals of the *prima* and *seconda practica* were the same. This stylistic evolution shows in microcosm that while the cultural associations between particular musical elements and emotions have changed considerably, the goal of the madrigalists to communicate emotion through music remains relevant (and resonates with my own humanist goals in text setting). Burkholder et al. (2006) deftly captures the lasting legacy of the madrigal:

Most of our assumptions about what music should do when setting poetry were established in and for the sixteenth-century madrigal. This emphasis on matching every aspect of the text profoundly differentiated the madrigal from earlier secular songs ... and it reflects the deepening impact of humanism on musical culture over the course of the Renaissance. That we still find madrigals so engaging today suggests the continuing importance of that humanist influence for our own culture and music. (p. 255)

Finally, in addition to acknowledging the importance of text intelligibility and emotional expression of the poetry in my own music, it was important to examine (much like Zarlino and Monteverdi) exactly how music and text might interact in order to meet these goals within my own cultural and historical framework. I recognize that I have

glossed over several centuries of significant developments in text setting between the Baroque era and the present day, but I will forego further chronology. Suffice it to say that while Renaissance vocal music is to me the true “grandfather” of text setting, many other poetic and musical norms through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries also had an obvious impact on my compositional framework. For instance, it was important to understand both the context and content of Rilke’s poetry (discussed in Chapter 2) as products of the artistic ideologies and poetic norms of the *fin de siècle*. Only after formulating my own understanding of the structural, literal and metaphoric contents of Rilke’s words was I able to decide which musical devices I might use to represent each of those layers in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context. In an era with fewer definitive musical symbols or aesthetic norms (like those in *Le Istitutioni harmoniche*), I needed to make some subjective decisions as to how I would convey musical meaning and expressivity. What follows will examine how I used prosody to help execute these decisions.

### Prosody

A proper text setting requires a secure understanding of the poem’s prosody. In most poems there are certain metric emphases that are straightforward and others that are ambiguous. The elevated linguistic character of poetry leaves some room for interpretation as to how certain words or syllables may be stressed when read aloud or sung. This particular nuance inherent to poetry can be more difficult to ascertain in a language other than the native tongue. Meter is a significant poetic device in *Das Stundenbuch*—another reason that retaining the German was important to the setting. As someone with a limited command of the German language, I consulted German dictionaries to confirm the syllabication of the words. I also sought the assistance of a

soprano who speaks German and recorded her speaking the poems so that I could refer to her pronunciation and excellent execution of German diction as a guide. Some of the authors of the translations I used also discussed Rilke's poetic meter in the frontal material of their books, which was another useful source. Finally, I studied a recording of the Bavarian singer/actor Michael Heltau reciting selections from *Das Stundenbuch* (2006). I will illustrate some of the metric devices I discovered in the text of the fourth movement, *Supplication*.

Figure 1 illustrates the prosodic features of the poem. The process of graphically representing stressed and unstressed syllables is called scansion (Conrey, 2010). Stressed syllables are marked with a slash (/), known in poetry as an ictus, and unstressed syllables are marked with a u-shaped symbol (∪) known as a breve (Fussell, 1979). When there were syllables that I felt could be stressed or unstressed depending on the reading of the poem, I circled the symbol in question. The scansion in Figure 1 immediately clarifies the meters that Rilke employed. I will use the first quatrain of the poem to illustrate some of the interesting features of the meter.

The first and third lines of the first quatrain use amphibrachic tetrameter. An amphibrach refers to the poetic foot, or unit of stressed and unstressed syllables (Baldick, 2008). The amphibrachic foot is an unstressed/stressed/unstressed pattern (∪ / ∪) (Baldick, 2008). Tetrameter indicates the number of feet per line: in this case, four (Conrey, 2013). A more commonly known meter is iambic pentameter, which appears in sonnets and has an unstressed/stressed foot used five times per line (Conrey, 2013).

U / U U / U U / U U / U  
 Ich le-be mein Le-ben in wach-sen-den Rin-gen,  
 U ( / ) ( / ) U U / U /  
 die sich ü-ber die Din-ge ziehn.  
 U / U U / U U / ( / ) U / U  
 Ich wer-de den letz-ten viel-leicht nicht voll-brin-gen,  
 ( / ) U U / U / U /  
 a-ber ver-su-chen will ich ihn.

U / U U / U U / U U /  
 Ich krei-se um Gott, um den ur-al-ten Turm,  
 U U / U U / U U /  
 und ich krei-se jahr-tau-sen-de-lang;  
 U U / U ( / ) U ( / ) U / U U /  
 und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Fal-ke, ein Sturm  
 ( / ) U U / U U /  
 o-der ein gro-ßer Ge-sang.

Figure 1. Scansion of *Supplication* Text

In my initial analysis of the audio recordings, I felt that the word *nicht* (not) in the third line of Figure 1 could be stressed or unstressed, depending on the reading of the poem. It is clear from the structure established in the first line that leaving it unstressed retains the meter (compare lines 1 and 3 in Figure 1). It is interesting to note that amphibrachic meter is widely used in Russian poetry (Finch, 2012, p. 406). Rilke transmits this poem through the narrative voice of Apostol, a Russian monk. While he does not use amphibrachic meter throughout, it seems a significant choice for the opening line of only the second poem in the *Stundenbuch*.

The second and fourth lines of the first quatrain in Figure 1 still use tetrameter, but they do not retain a consistent foot. The latter two feet in each line (*die Dinge ziehn* and *-chen will ich ihn*) are both iambs (unstressed/stressed) but the first two feet of each line are inversions of one another. The second line (*die sich über*) uses an iamb followed

by its inversion, the trochee (stressed/unstressed) (Conrey, 2013), while the fourth uses a trochee followed by an iamb (*aber versu-*). I circled three of the four stressed syllables in this section. The ambiguity of the stress is inherent in the fact that the predictable meter breaks down at these points.

Some of these stressed syllables are also hierarchically weaker than those that follow. For example, the stresses on *die Dinge* in line 2 are fairly indisputable, unlike those on *die sich*. The word *Dinge* is trochaic by nature (like the English word *curtain*); altering its prosody would render an erroneous pronunciation. However, the monosyllabic word *sich* could be stressed or unstressed. The amphibrach of the previous line sets an expectation that it should be stressed, which would continue the pattern (compare lines 1 and 2 in Figure 1). Following *sich*, though, the pattern is unquestionably thwarted by the word *über*, another inherently trochaic word. *Über* places the stress squarely on the third syllable of the line—a slot that is unstressed in every other line of the quatrain (visible in the vertical alignment of the breves in Figure 1). This displacement of emphasis perhaps retroactively calls for an unstressed statement of the word *sich* to avoid two adjacent stressed syllables, which interrupts the flow of the meter. Another solution is to treat the stresses hierarchically, where *sich* is more emphasized than *die* but less so than the *ü-* of *über*.

Figure 2 shows the musical methods I used to reflect this ambiguity. Note that unless otherwise indicated I now refer to the musical meter rather than the poetic. The unstressed *sie* falls on an anacrusis, and the stress of *dich* is reflected in its metric placement on the downbeat. The *ü-* of *über* falls on beat two of the measure. While still on the beat, it is metrically weaker in the hierarchy of the bar (Note: throughout

*Supplication*, I use a duple six-four meter with the dotted half receiving the beat rather than a triple meter with a half note receiving the beat). However, the scalar placement of the words yields a stronger emphasis on *ü-* than on *dich*. I make clear use of D-flat major in this section. The descending motion from G-flat to F on these syllables implies a resolution from *fa* to *mi* in the scale, which would melodically emphasize the *ü-* on the second beat. I repeat this method in the next measure with the *Din-* of *Dinge* receiving metric emphasis while *Ziehn* receives scalar emphasis (even more so with the tonic). This disparity creates a displaced downbeat that reflects the displacement of the poetic meter.

27  
S. Solo

*f*

*mp*

sie dich ü - ber die Din - ge Ziehn\_\_\_\_\_

Figure 2. Prosodic Ambiguity in *Supplication*, mm. 27-30

The inverted emphases in the corresponding place in the fourth line of the poem (*aber versu-* in Figure 1) leave one lone trochee followed by three consecutive iambs. The trochee falls on the word *aber* (but), which is incidentally an internal half rhyme with *über*. This isolated foot disrupts both the preceding and subsequent meters, which effectually illustrates the meaning of the word itself. I reflected this disruption musically with a two-measure melisma on the *a-* of *aber* (shown in Figure 3). The previously syllabic and neumatic settings (not shown) propel the motion of the (poetically) metrically consistent third line, which are stalled by the syncopation and lengthened durations on *aber*. I also used the change of (poetic) meter and the meaning of the word to employ a harmonic shift away from D-flat major, shown in the reduction in Figure 3.

The modal mixture between the minor and major submediant in m. 43 along with the addition of the ninth in m. 44 create a pivot away from D-flat. The remainder of the fourth line of the poem (not shown) passes through brief tonicizations of F major and C major before the tonality begins to dissipate altogether after the completion of the stanza.

40

*mp*

a - - - - - ber

Db: IV6      vi      VI ----- 9

Figure 3. Text Setting and Harmony in *Supplication*, mm. 42-44

The examination of these four short lines of text shows the high level of nuance in Rilke's prosody and choice of meter. He connects the poem to his Russian narrator through amphibrachic tetrameter and moves away from this pattern at meaningful places in the text. Coming to understand Rilke's metric choices proved to be an invaluable analytical window into his poetry. His execution of prosody served as a model for my metric and rhythmic choices and gave me a thread of inferred meaning through which I could explore a multitude of possible musical implications. The next chapter will address some parameters of the text setting beyond the treatment of prosody as well as how I used harmony and form to explore the various additional musical implications present in the poems.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MUSIC

In addition to the prosody, there are many other poetic devices in these poems that called for musical treatment, among them rhyme scheme, line breaks, word repetition, imagery, metaphor, and the connotation versus denotation of the words. I relied on an equal number of musical devices to represent these poetic elements. I continued to think about the declamation of the text in relation to the prosody, and (as introduced in Figure 3), I utilized the orchestra to create harmonic representations of the changes in the poem. There were some devices that transferred rather literally between the poetry and the music, such as word repetition with musical repetition and breaks of line and stanza with interludes. These easily paralleled devices provided me with an opportunity to meet or break the listener's expectation. For example, by choosing not to use musical repetition on a repeated word, I depart from the expected link to the poetry and can therefore imply a marked moment in the music. Some of the broader devices such as metaphor and connotation required careful consideration of how they might be implied musically. The melodic content of the soprano solo and the harmonic and textural construction of the orchestra together exhibit the means by which I addressed these relationships.

#### Text Setting

Since intelligibility and text depiction were of the utmost importance, I composed outward from the vocal line in my compositional process. The soprano line was the germinal material for much of my orchestral writing. This approach also helped curb the largest orchestrational challenge of this work: balancing the soprano and the orchestra. I will illustrate some of my methodologies of text depiction by discussing my setting of the

last three lines of the second stanza from the first movement, *Adoration* (see Appendix A). This excerpt marks the halfway point of the poem as well as the movement. Figure 4 shows the soprano solo and the string section, which cover all of the harmonies sounded in this excerpt. For the sake of concision, the wind and percussion doublings are not shown in the figure.

My own rough translation of these lines reads: “My best strength should be like an urge, /without anger and without hesitation; /the way children love you.” To start, I will point out some of the more straightforward instances of text painting in the excerpt. One is the peak of the melodic phrase on the word *Kraft* (strength). The crescendo into the highest notes of the line underscores the meaning of the word. The vowel sound in *Kraft* is also well suited for the upper register of the voice—the [a] is easily carried in that tessitura. Another example is the half-step trill on *Trieb*, (urge or desire). The trill mimics the tension of the word—both the music and the text connote unrest and a need for resolution. The [i] sound on *Trieb* is also slightly more difficult to produce in this register than [a], which also adds to the tension. Finally, the outline of a G-major triad on the text *Kinder lieb* (children’s love) is also a direct word painting. The narrator uses *Kinder lieb* as a metaphor for the way she wishes to live out her callings in life. The pure and simple major triad mirrors the purity and simplicity of a child’s love.

Additional text depiction exists below the surface level. There is a clear rhyme scheme throughout this poem. The rhyme structure of the first two stanzas is ABAB in the first quatrain and CDCDC in the second cinquain (see Appendix A). Figure 4 includes the CDC rhyme at the end of the stanza on the words *Trieb*, *Zagen* and *lieb*. I depicted the rhyme of *Trieb* and *lieb* by using the same pitch for both words (G)

94 *f* *b* *tr* **F**  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

S. Solo  
Mei - ne bes - te Kraft soll sein wie ein Trieb,

Vln. I  
*pizz.* *mp* *mf* *f* *sub. p* *arco* *pp*

Vln. II  
*pizz.* *mp* *f* *mf* *pp* *arco*

Vla.  
*mp* *mf* *f* *sub. p* *pp* *arco, sul pont.* *mf*

Vc.  
*mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *I suono reale* *pp* *mf*

Cb.  
*mp* *mf* *p* *mp*

**G**

103 *p* *mf* *mp*

S. Solo  
so oh - ne Zur - nen I und oh - ne Za - gen so ha - ben dich ja die Kin - der lieb. III

Vln. I  
*mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vln. II  
*mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vla.  
*pp* *mf* *p* *mp* *p* *mf*

Vc.  
*pp* *mf* *p* *mp* *p* *ord. III* *p*

Cb.  
*pp* *mf* *p* *mp* *p* *sim.* *p*

Figure 4. Excerpt from *Adoration*, mm. 91-114

separated by an octave. In addition to the repetitive rhyme scheme of the poetic lines, there are also internal rhymes in this excerpt, for example between the words *Zagen* and *haben*. My methodology here was similar to the previous rhyme. I set the word *Zagen* on the pitches F and G (Figure 4, m. 108) and then set *haben* on the reverse, G and F (m. 110). In this way, the pitch relationships of the patterned rhyme scheme are very strong (the same pitch an octave apart) and the relationships of the internal rhyme scheme are still closely related but slightly altered (melodically inverted). This method acknowledges both the existence and the strength of each rhyme in the context of the stanza. Rilke also repeats the word *ohne* (without) in these lines. I began both statements of the word on the same pitch (A) to correspond with the repetition, but the repetition is not rhythmically or melodically the same after the statement of the A (see mm. 104 and 108). The reason for this has to do with the setting of the line as a whole, the words that follow the repetitive *ohne*, and the harmonies that represent them, which I will discuss now.

The harmonies and instrumental texture also portray the text. The line “*so ohne Zürnen und ohne Zagen*” (without anger and without hesitation) is set over a harmonic dyad in the orchestra that contracts from a tritone to a major second before shifting to triadic harmonies on the line “*so haben dich ja die Kinder lieb*” (the way children love you). The first part of the line (*so ohne Zürnen*) is harmonized by a G/C-sharp tritone I chose to depict the word *Zürnen* (anger). Since the narrator is saying *without* anger, I set the tritone in an understated way, sounding in a very high harmonic in the violins and in a *pianissimo sul ponticello* in the violas and cellos. My goal was to depict the word while also making reference to the fact that the narrator is stating its absence, not its presence.

The soprano melodically outlines the tritone as well, moving up by whole tones from G to C-sharp and falling back to the G at the end of the motive (Figure 4, mm. 103-106).

After the completion of the word *Zürnen*, the dyad contracts to a major third on G and B (m. 107). This consonance helps reinforce the idea that the narrator is indeed without anger, and leads the soprano into the next segment of the line, *und ohne Zagen*. At this point the lower register drops out and only the high harmonics support the singer. The dyad contracts once more to a major second on A and B (m. 108). The reintroduced dissonance depicts the word *Zagen* (hesitation), but again in an understated manner. Without reinforcement of this dyad in the lower octaves, the interval is less distinguishable in the high violin harmonics, indicating hesitation in an indirect way. The soprano rhythmically depicts the statement by way of short eighth notes on *Zagen*. This declamation is quick compared to the dotted half notes of the corresponding *Zürnen*, reinforcing that she is actually speaking *without* hesitation. As with *Zürnen*, the completion of the word *Zagen* is followed by a third. This time the dyad expands to a minor third on G-sharp and B, departing from the whole tone collection at the end of the poetic line and transitioning into third-related dyads to depict the children's love in the last line of the stanza.

This excerpt illustrates some of the subjective ways I sought to depict the many layers of meaning embedded in Rilke's poetry. I often used the soprano line to show the literal meaning, and I utilized the orchestra to help uncover other more abstract devices and connotations hidden beneath the surface. As evident in the above paragraphs, I often did so via my choice of pitch content. The majority of *Symphonic Prayers* uses the modes of limited transposition as its governing harmony, mentioned briefly in Chapter 1. The

remainder of this chapter will explain the modes and further illustrate some of the ways I used harmony as a device for text depiction and to convey extra-musical meaning.

### Harmony and the Modes of Limited Transposition

Olivier Messiaen was interested in scalar symmetry, and employed it extensively in his compositions. As a result of his explorations, he characterized seven “modes of limited transposition” in his book *La technique de mon langage musical* (The Technique of my Musical Language), each of which is a symmetrical scale that can only be transposed so many times before mapping back onto itself (Messiaen, 1956, p. 58). The most familiar of these is the first mode, commonly known as the whole-tone scale.

Donald Street describes the remaining modes in this way:

Mode 2 is composed of four segments, each comprising the intervals of a tone and a semitone (or the reverse). As a result it is transposable (enharmonically) three times, like the chord of the diminished 7<sup>th</sup>. Mode 3 consists of three segments, each comprising a tone followed by two semitones (or alternatively two semitones and a tone, or a semitone, a tone and a semitone). Like the augmented triad it is transposable four times. Modes 4-7 all consist of two segments, and all of them can be transposed six times, as can the interval of the augmented 4<sup>th</sup>. (Street, 1976, p. 819)

Mode 2 is also commonly referred to as an octatonic scale. The remaining modes are most easily understood by examining their patterns of steps and thirds, shown in Figure 5. Half steps are labeled with an H, whole steps with a W, minor thirds with m3 and major thirds with M3. The brackets indicate the identical subsets within each mode, which shows where the pattern repeats. The number of possible transpositions in each mode is equal to the number of semitones between each subset. Since Modes 4-7 divide into two subsets a tritone apart, they each have six possible transpositions (Messiaen, 1956, p. 58). I did not include Mode 1 (the whole-tone scale) in the figure since it is self-explanatory.

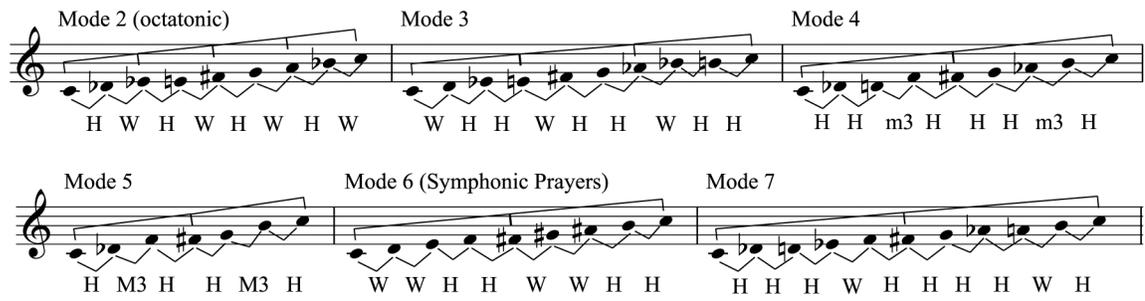


Figure 5. The Modes of Limited Transposition

Messiaen was not the only one to use these modes, nor did he claim to have invented them; he simply catalogued them in his book (Street, 1976). Other composers who utilized the modes include Debussy, Bartók, Stravinsky, and Holst. The most compelling feature of the modes is their tonal ambiguity. One can fluidly move in and out of various tonal centers using this symmetrical system, which was a very useful compositional tool for me. Street makes a similar indication by saying, “the attraction of the modes of limited transposition is in the tonal ambiguity which results from their symmetry, for, as Messiaen points out, a tonality can be emphasized or left unsettled” (Street, 1976, p. 819).

Mode 6 was the basis of my harmonic language in all of *Symphonic Prayers*, which is comprised of a repeating WWHH pattern. As the above excerpt implies, the mode offers a wealth of possibilities for deriving different melodic and harmonic material. Figure 6 shows some of the subsets of Mode 6 that aid in moving in and out of various tonal areas. The (0135) tetrachords each have strong tonal implications. Subsets 1a and 1b of (0135) can imply C major, or the B can be substituted with B-flat to imply F major. Similarly, subsets 1c and 1d can imply F-sharp major, or E major if the F (E-

sharp) is substituted with an E. Both of these substitutions still adhere to the mode. Additionally, the entire whole-tone scale is embedded in Mode 6, which allows for easy transference away from tonal centers and into a post-tonal realm. The three dominant seventh chords aid in implying tonality, but the Mode prevents using them in a functional way since the tonic triads they imply are not subsets of the scale. The only approximation of a dominant/tonic relationship would be the incomplete dominant seventh on D moving to an incomplete triad on B/D, implying the tonic G. Mode 6 prevents a strong establishment of any particular tonality, but provides ample opportunity for tonal implication and ambiguity.

1. Four (0135) Tetrachords

a.  b.  c.  d. 

2. Whole Tone Scale



3. Four Diatonic Seventh Chords

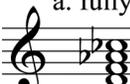
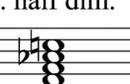
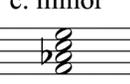
a. fully dim.  b. half dim.  c. minor  d. dominant (1 incomplete) 

Figure 6. Subsets of Mode 6

I used rotation and different transpositions of Mode 6 in each movement to prevent harmonic stagnation over the course of the work. Each transposition is shown in Figure 7. *Adoration* uses three transpositions of Mode 6. The movement begins with a rotation of the scale with D as the “tonic,” or anchor pitch (See Figure 7). One might perceive this rotation as a “mode of the Mode,” analogous to the relationship between a

C-Major scale and a D-Dorian scale. This rotation is used throughout the movement, but is stated in two subsequent transpositions as the movement progresses: one up a minor third to F, and the other up a whole step to E (both shown in Figure 7). The movement concludes at the original transposition on D.

The figure illustrates the rotation and transpositions of Mode 6. The top staff shows the original mode on D with an intervallic pattern of W W H H W W H H. An arrow points to the 'Rotation on D' which maintains the same intervallic pattern. Below this, six staves show the mode transposed to D, Eb, E, F, F#, and G.

Figure 7. Rotation and Transpositions of Mode 6

Each modulation to a new transposition marks a significant moment in the text. For example, the first shift from the D scale to the F scale occurs just before the excerpt shown in Figure 4 (which uses the collection on F). The modulation coincides with the line “*Aber ich will dir damit nur sagen*” (For what I want to say to you is this), which illustrates a change of pace in the poem. The narrator addresses God and prepares to deliver her prayer. When she does so (on *Meine beste Kraft*, shown in Figure 4), the new transposition of the Mode on F has replaced the one on D to illustrate the shift in the narrative.

*Adoration* used three of the six possible transpositions of Mode 6. *Confession* uses two additional transpositions as well as free chromaticism. In the same way that I transposed the Mode to illustrate a change in the poem in *Adoration*, I moved between

the Mode and the full aggregate to illustrate a narrative shift in *Confession*. This occurs on the text “*Doch vor dem ersten Tode kam der Mord*” (Yet before the first death came murder), shown in Figure 8.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Solo (Soprano), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Cb.). The Solo part is in treble clef, and the other two are in bass clef. The Solo part has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Doch vor dem ers-ten To - de kam der Mord." The Solo part starts at measure 68 with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The Viola part starts with a dynamic marking of *ff* and has a dynamic marking of *mp* at measure 70. The Cello part starts with a dynamic marking of *ff* and has a dynamic marking of *p* at measure 70. The Solo part has a dynamic marking of *p* at measure 70 and a dynamic marking of *mf* at measure 73. The Viola part has a dynamic marking of *p* at measure 70. The Cello part has a dynamic marking of *f* at measure 70 and a dynamic marking of *p* at measure 73. A box labeled 'G' is at the end of the Solo part.

Figure 8. Motion from Mode 6 to Chromatic Saturation in *Confession*

This line is a drastic shift in tone from the six opening lines, which essentially summarize God’s call to us to live our lives well. After adhering to the Mode on F# through this portion of the narrative, I begin to introduce pitches outside the Mode and incorporate chromatic lines and tritones to paint the words *Tode* (death) and *Mord* (murder), shown in Figure 8. The F natural in m. 70 is the first pitch sounded outside of the Mode, which perhaps melodically implies D minor, but quickly dissolves into a chromatic descent on *Tode*. This sinking chromaticism is mirrored in the viola at m. 73. The measures that follow Figure 8 proceed to complete the aggregate on the dramatic line “*Da ging ein Riß durch diene reifen Kreise*” (A sharp rip tore through your ripe circles). The foray into the full chromatic is used to dramatize this violent shift in the poem. The Mode eventually reappears, briefly using the transposition on G and then modulating back to the original collection on F#.

Five of the six transpositions of the Mode are stated in the first two movements discussed above. Not surprisingly then, *Thanksgiving* uses the sixth and final transposition on E-flat. The (prosodic) meter, rhyme scheme and line length in *Thanksgiving* was nearly entirely consistent between each stanza, so I used a modified strophic form in my setting. For this reason, I wanted to maintain a consistent harmonic language to remain true to the strophic form. This movement uses orchestrational, rhythmic and textural alterations to depict the text, which is outside the purview of this chapter. The final movement, *Supplication*, returns to the transpositions used in *Adoration* as a sort of harmonic recapitulation of the work as a whole. The piece ends as it began, on the D transposition of Mode 6. The final pitch in the work is a long sustained D, which was heard in isolation throughout the first movement as well and is largely the anchor pitch for the work as a whole.

Mode 6 of the modes of limited transposition proved to be an incredibly apt and useful harmonic language for my settings of ACTS prayers. I felt that the ability to use clear triadic language without necessarily establishing a key was an appropriate metaphor for the way Rilke felt about spirituality. He believed in the divine but did not ascribe to organized religion, in much the same manner that I use tonality but not in a functional way. There are also elements of Rilke's poems that express doubt or disillusionment, which can be harmonically mirrored by using post-tonality or whole-tone collections. I was able to use the modes to express the range of emotions I feel are embodied in the four ACTS prayers. This versatile harmonic language helped me to meet my goals of text depiction and musical expression.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The desired outcome of any composition is obviously a performance of the work, and I have the good fortune to have already heard the first movement of *Symphonic Prayers* in a live performance. I transcribed *Adoration* for chamber orchestra to match the performing ensemble, which in this case included single woodwinds, single brass (no tuba), one percussionist, harp, and a small string section. This reductive exercise was challenging but useful. Having composed the original work outward from soprano line and harmonic sketch to short score to full score (as composers often do), I found new possibilities in the orchestration by reducing from large to small orchestra.

The sizable reduction (of the brass especially) forced me to place certain lines in different instrument families, which revealed some timbral combinations that I would not have thought of with the full orchestra available to me. For instance, I made greater use of the bassoon in the chamber version since I no longer had a tuba (and fewer trombones and horns) to cover the lower registers. Replacing the tuba with the low range of the bassoon in an otherwise all-brass texture proved to be a successful transference and an interesting and subtle alteration of the orchestral color. The reduction also showed me where I could trim doublings and in some cases trim harmony and counterpoint in the full work and still successfully convey the musical idea. While in most cases the reduction seemed like a timbral, textural or harmonic concession from the original, there were some alterations I made for the chamber version that I ended up adopting in the original for their clarity or concision.

The rehearsal process and performance were also enlightening, as they always are. Having never written a vocal work with orchestra before, I was very concerned about making sure the soprano would be heard over the orchestra. It was incredibly useful to hear the degree to which she carried over the chamber orchestra, which gave me a better idea of how that balance will translate to a larger ensemble. The next step in this project will be completing the piano vocal score for the remaining three movements. This is another reductive process that is challenging but useful and important for the sake of the singer. I look forward to completing the next steps in this process in anticipation of a performance with full orchestra.

The common thematic thread that connects the entirety of these pages as well as *Symphonic Prayers* as a composition is the search for a connection with the divine through humanism and art. The more time I spent with Rilke's poetry, the more I came to enjoy and appreciate his work, and ultimately empathize with him as a creative and spiritual person. His desire to connect people to each other and to God through his art resonated with my own compositional inspirations and goals. Rilke's poems are the product of his sustained efforts to create a connection with the divine, and they became a critical tool in my own attempt to connect to God through a musical lens in *Symphonic Prayers*.

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APPENDIX A  
SYMPHONIC PRAYERS TEXT

from *Das Studienbuch*  
by Rainer Maria Rilke

I. Adoration:

Ich glaube an Alles noch nie Gesagte.  
Ich will meine frömmsten Gefühle befreien.  
Was noch keiner zu wollen wagte,  
wird mir einmal unwillkürlich sein.

Ist das vermessen, mein Gott, vergieb.  
Aber ich will dir damit nur sagen:  
Meine beste Kraft soll sein wie ein Trieb,  
so ohne Zürnen und ohne Zagen;  
so haben dich ja die Kinder lieb.

Mit diesem Hinfluten, mit diesem Münden  
in breiten Armen ins offene Meer,  
mit dieser wachsenden Wiederkehr  
will ich dich bekennen, will ich dich verkünden  
wie keiner vorher.

Und ist das Hoffahrt, so lass mich hoffährtig sein  
für mein Gebet,  
das so ernst und allein  
vor deiner wolkigen Stirne steht.

-Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben, #12

Translation:

I have great faith in all things not yet spoken.  
I want my deepest pious feelings freed.  
What no one yet has dared to risk and warrant  
will be for me a challenge I must meet.

If this presumptuous seems, God, may I be forgiven.  
For what I want to say to you is this:  
my efforts shall be like a driving force,  
quite without anger, without timidity  
as little children show their love for you.

With these outflowings, river-like, with deltas

that spread like arms to reach the open sea,  
with the recurrent tides that never cease  
will I acknowledge you, will I proclaim you  
as no one ever has before.

And if this should be arrogance, so let me  
arrogant be to justify my prayer  
that stands so serious and so alone  
before your forehead, circled by the clouds.

-The Book of the Monastic Life, #12  
Translated by Albert Ernest Flemming

## II. Confession:

Ich lese es heraus aus deinem Wort,  
aus der Geschichte der Gebärden,  
mit welchen deine Hände um das Werden  
sich ründeten, begrenzend, warm und weise.  
Du sagtest leben laut und sterben leise  
und wiederholtest immer wieder: Sein.  
Doch vor dem ersten Tode kam der Mord.  
Da ging ein Riß durch diene reifen Kreise  
und ging ein Schrein  
und Riß die Stimmen fort,  
die eben erst sich sammelten,  
um dich zu sagen,  
um dich zu tragen  
alles Abgrunds Brücke—

Und was sie seither stammelten,  
sind Stücke  
deines alten Namens.

-Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben, #9

### Translation:

I read it here in your very word,  
in the story of the gestures  
with which your hands cupped themselves  
around our becoming—limiting, warm.  
You said *live* out loud, and *die* you said lightly,  
and over and over again you said *be*.  
But before the first death came murder.  
A fracture broke across the rings you'd ripened.

A screaming shattered the voices  
that had just come together to speak you,  
to make of you a bridge  
over the chasm of everything.

And what they have stammered ever since  
are fragments  
of your ancient name.

-The Book of the Monastic Life, #9  
Translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

III. Thanksgiving:

Ich will ihn preisen. Wie vor einem Heere  
die Hörner gehen, will ich gehn und schrein.  
Mein Blut soll lauter rauschen denn die Meere,  
mein Wort soll süß sein, dass man sein begehre,  
und doch nicht irre machen wie der Wein.

Und in den Frühlingsnächten, wenn nicht viele  
geblieben sind um meine Lagerstatt,  
dann will ich blühn in meinem Saitenspiele  
so leise wie die nördlichen Aprile,  
die spät und ängstlich sind um jedes Blatt.

Denn meine Stimme wuchs nach zweien Seiten  
und ist ein Duften worden und ein Schrein:  
die eine will den Fernen vorbereiten,  
die andere muss meiner Einsamkeiten  
Gesicht und Seligkeit und Engel sein.

-Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode, #11

Translation:

I want to praise him. As before a troop  
the horns are carried, I will go and shout.  
My blood shall rush much louder than the seas,  
my speech be sweet so that one longs for it,  
yet not bedazzle as does wine.

And during spring when only a few  
have remained around my bed,  
then I will shine by playing the harp  
so sweetly as the northern April days

worried about each leaf – since they are late.

For my voice will have grown in two directions,  
becoming scent, becoming cry:  
one preparing the traveler from afar,  
the other being mirror and angel and bliss  
of my lonely days.

-The Book of Poverty and Death, #11  
Translated by Annemarie S. Kidder

IV. Supplication:

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,  
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.  
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,  
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,  
und ich kreise jahrtausendlang;  
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm  
oder ein großer Gesang.

-Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben, #2

Translation:

I live my life in ever widening circles,  
each superseding all the previous ones.  
Perhaps I never shall succeed in reaching  
the final circle, but attempt I will.

I circle around God, the ancient tower,  
and have been circling for a thousand years,  
and still I do not know: am I a falcon,  
a storm, or a continuing great song?

-The Book of the Monastic Life, #2  
Translated by Albert Ernest Flemming