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<b>TOTAL</b>			

# CATALOGUE AND INTRODUCTION TO CHORAL COMPOSITIONS BY MICHAEL DEASON-BARROW

TONALIS EDITION  
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# THE CHORAL COMPOSITIONS OF MICHAEL DEASON-BARROW

## A NEW IMAGINATION OF SACRED MUSIC

The Choral Compositions of Michael Deason-Barrow have been inspired by a new vision of music in Sacred Practice. e.g. Much of his music has been composed to meet the need of sacred musicing in a wider variety of contexts and functions than normal, including:

**MUSIC IN:** • Liturgy (Christian, Interfaith & Others) • Rites of Passage  
• Prayer • Meditation • Pilgrimages to Sacred Spaces.

They represent a new distinctive voice in contemporary sacred musicing inspired by thinking about music in spiritual practice outside the box of conventional thinking on the subject.

### New Thinking on the Relationship between Choir & Congregation

The sometimes divisive issue of who sings / plays music in liturgy and festivals - namely the specialist choir or the whole circle of participants - finds a new answer in Deason-Barrow's compositions. Inspired by the example of composers such as Benjamin Britten, many of his compositions have been designed so that a wide variety of participants - from children → congregation → specialist choir → professional soloists - can simultaneously take part, as the music is specifically composed to meet their differing vocal and musical abilities. Moreover, all non-specialist parts - namely those for congregation/ children - are inspired by the need to address both participants deepest musical selves and their highest spiritual aspirations, e.g. through the singing of new and more mysterious harmonies that stretch both the ears and hearts of participants in ways that awaken them to new dimensions of spiritual awareness. (To bring this about he often employs step-wise movement away from more well known structural notes, e.g. a triad, so that amateurs can sing these more complex harmonies.)

To achieve the above, Deason-Barrow frequently asks some members of the choir to assist the whole circle of singers in singing their congregational parts. Further more, these non-specialist parts - which can be taught aurally without the need for music reading skills - are often supported by the organist and/or instrumentalists. (Alternatively, Deason-Barrow employs a new form of music notation he has created which can be read by non-specialists.) Simultaneously the choir - often singing in small groups in different parts of the building - sing music with more challenging intervals, harmonies and rhythms requiring more extensive voice and musicianship skills.

### FOR WHITSUN

- Come Holy Spirit (based on the Gregorian Chant 'Come Holy Ghost') £2.00  
SS AA TT BB with Improvisation and optional Organ and Instruments + Congregation/Circle of Singers A - B

### FOR MIDSUMMER

- To See a World in a Grain of Sand - (poem by William Blake) £1.50  
SS AA TT BB with Improvisation and optional gongs B-C  
And tam tam
- The Eye of the Great God - (prayer from Celtic Sun Dances) £2.50  
SATB with divisions, optional gongs, lurs, bass drum & tam tam B-C
- I Thank You God for this Most Amazing Day - (poem e.e. cummings) £3.00  
SATB with divisions C

### FOR WEDDINGS

- No Sweeter Tone (poem by Angelus Silesius) £1.50  
SS AA TT BB B

### FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Be Still and Know that I am God - Short score £1.00  
a Sung Breathing Meditation SATB Full score £3.00  
for Congregation and Optional instruments A

## GUIDE TO LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

All Choral Pieces listed as: 'SATB + Congregation + Circle of Singers' indicates that these works have been written for Mixed Ability Groups. Typically the choir part is written at level B/C, whereas the Circle of Singers parts are written at level A and can be taught orally. All instrumental parts are optional apart from 'Curt Sigh'.

### GRADES OF DIFFICULTY

- A = Easy - Oral Teaching is possible. The vocal range is moderate.
- B = Moderate
- C = Moderately Challenging - Requires both good foundation level music reading and vocal skills.

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## CHORAL COMPOSITIONS BY MICHAEL DEASON-BARROW

### FOR ADVENT

- Curt Sigh - (poem by Parancs János) £3.00 each  
SS, AA, TT, BB with Improvisation and Instruments  
Gongs, Tam Tam, Bass Drum, Psalteries, Glockenspiel, Lyre,  
Choroi Flute, String Fields, Tibetan Bowl, Finger Cymbals,  
Treble Recorder & Cello C
- Verbum supernum prodiens (based on Sarum Chant) £1.50  
SATB with Improvisation A - B
- Candles (poem by Howard Thurman) £1.50  
SS AA TT BB + Congregation/Circle of Singers, Chime Bars  
and Speaker

### FOR THE NEW YEAR

- Candles (*as above*)
- God Help Us to Change (prayer by Michael Leunig) £1.50  
SS AA TT BB + Congregation/Circle of Singers and Speaker A - B
- Meditations in Song - £2.50  
(texts by Angelus Silesius, St. Francis of Assisi, Robert Frost,  
Michael Leunig, J. Rumi, T.S. Elliot) SS AA TT BB A - B  
+ Congregation/Circle of Singers  
+ Optional Gongs, Tam Tam & Chime Bars

### FOR SPRING & PASSIONTIDE

- Loves Ground - (poem by Paul Matthews) £2.50  
SS AA TT BB and Semi-Chorus B-C
- Kyrie (poem by R.S. Thomas) £1.50  
SS AA TT BB with optional Organ C
- The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross - *individually*  
SATB with Improvisation + Congregation/Circle of Singers
  - i) Father Forgive Them & ii) Verily I Say To You £1.00
  - iii) Woman Behold Thy Son £1.00
  - iv) Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? £1.50
  - v) I Thirst & vi) It is Finished £1.00
  - vii) Father Into Thy Hands £1.00
- The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross - *as a booklet* £3.00  
SATB with Improvisation + Congregation/Circle of Singers

## God is not Western or Eastern but hears the Whole World

‘We have reached the point in human evolution where we have to meet, share and discover one another in a manor analogous to the religious search today for the eternal church.’ (James Roose-Evans)

The comparative study of world religions and their musics today is leading many people to significantly different perspectives on music and spirituality. The questions they are posing to us challenge any theological or musical narrow-mindedness we might have.

Deason-Barrow's compositions have been created for people who are searching for new ways of creating inter-spiritual and inter-cultural dialogue, namely, for 'World Believers', who understand that the divine is universal, but that religions - like different musical languages - are particular. Thus, musical influences can be heard in his works derived from diverse spiritual paths, including vocal techniques drawn from sacred chant traditions. (e.g. The Overtone Chanting of Buddhist practice and the use of non-Western instruments, e.g. African Drums.) Moreover, texts by Rumi, Tagore and Lao Tzu are sounded alongside writers of gnostic gospels such as St. Thomas (e.g. 'VERBUM SUPERNUM') and the prophetic voices of poets such as Blake, M. Leunig and R.S. Thomas (e.g. 'KYRIE' and 'TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND').

## Re-pitching & Re-tuning Sacred Musicing to more Universal Paradigms

‘To define God is to limit God, because as soon as you define God you are working within the limitations of your own definitions.’ (Deepak Chopra)

‘How can the conditioned form of human cultures work with the unconditional nature of the ultimate ground of all being?’ (Paul Tillich)

Deason-Barrow's commitment to inter-faith and inter-cultural paradigms is demonstrated by the way his compositions re-pitch and re-tune music to more holistic global paradigms rather than hide behind the walls of more culturally tuned beliefs. Thus, he often uses scales and melodies influenced, for instance, by Indian Ragas, along with rhythms, instruments and non-tempered tunings from other cultures. In particular, he uses the one archetypal structure behind all sound all cultures share, namely the Harmonic Series.

The 'Harmonic Series' lies beneath the surface differences of today's multiple musical idioms. It is the prior ground before its local manifestation into individual tunings and different musical languages. This series of tones acts as a kind of universal mantra or chord of nature which is both the lesson of the world to man and an objective unalterable fact of nature. It represents what we are when we are 'whole', whereas everything else is only part of the truth, or, as

acousticians say, is only a 'partial'. Every culture perceives this archetype, but each one makes its own unique relationship to it (e.g. Western Music is primarily derived from the intervals of the 3rd and 5th, whereas in Java, for instance, it is the pure 7th which determines their Slendro tuning).

Deason-Barrow's response to the above has been to create a new meeting between the pure intervals of the overtone/nature scale - found in the 4th octave of the Harmonic Series - and the full pleroma of the 12 chromatic tones available to Western musicians in pieces such as *'TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND'*. Through these new means, he helps us understand how, as Anthony Rooley puts it - **'Every age sounds a different tone and operates in a different scale.'**

### Improvisation and Creative Imagination in Sacred Music

There is an ever increasing call today for dialogue between the given wisdom of religious traditions and the active inner knowing of these truths through individual experience. Improvisation - influenced by the Pentecostal speaking in tongues of the apostles - and found in Deason-Barrow's compositions such as *'COME HOLY SPIRIT'* calls upon participants' creative artistic imagination, intuition and in-spiring to enter into their prayer life and meditative practice so that the music is inspired according to how the spirit moves them, rather than merely singing the notes of a fixed, finished composition created by someone else. In addition, singers are frequently invited to improvise using personally chosen texts, affirmations or mantras, etc. Through these improvisatory processes, Deason-Barrow's compositions also enable fellowship between participants to be strengthened via the co-creative process of improvisation.

### Sacred Music Responding to the Deepest Questions of our Time

Music with the power to confront the sources of human darkness and the ills of society finds a new voice in Deason-Barrow's music (e.g. *'KYRIE'* to a poem of *R.S.Thomas*). Following in the line of Britten's 'War Requiem' and Penderecki's 'St.Luke's Passion', Deason-Barrow believes that true spiritual striving is not marked by the evasion of conflict, tension and dissonance, and that new sacred compositions need to confront the deepest existential issues of our time (e.g. human rights abuses, etc.). Like the Scottish composer James MacMillan, his music responds to the agony of the cross and the pain of the world - the Agnus Dei - as well as the light of the Resurrection and the Gloria (e.g. *'LOVE'S GROUND'*).

**MICHAEL DEASON-BARROW** is the director of Tonalis: Centre for the Development of Music which offers training for Sacred Music Animateurs in 'Music as a Spiritual Practice', as well as trainings for 'Singing with the Whole Voice', 'Choir Training', 'Community Musicing', 'Music as a Therapeutic Practice' and 'Music Education'. As a boy he was a chorister in Salisbury Cathedral during which time he made numerous recordings and recitals as a soloist. He studied music at the Royal College of Music and went on to post-graduate singing studies with great masters such as Peter Pears and Jürgen Schriefer. He has a wide background as a performer: from art song recitals - including contemporary music written for his voice, to singing in Early Music consorts and Free Improvisation groups. He is a master singing teacher and inspirational choir trainer who gives courses all over the world connected to music as a sacred practice. In 2002 he led a musical pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral for which he composed a new cycle of works inspired by the sacred geometry of the cathedral and based on the framework of an original chant by Fulbertus of Chartres. Michael Deason-Barrow is an innovator whose intense need to understand the essence of music has led him to extend the boundaries of musical understanding and composition and to offer a new wider and more holistic vision of music for our times.



## The Music of Silence

Following in the footsteps of composers like Anton Webern and Arvo Pärt Deason-Barrow's music often explores the threshold where audible sound meets inaudible realms leading to a listening to what lies beyond the notes. For him, silence is not simply an absence of sound, but an attitude of attending to our encounter with absolute mystery, a listening to the creative source of all life (e.g. 'CURT SIGH' where individual words, notes and chords are frequently delivered one by one surrounded by huge silences so that the spirit can be heard speaking in the silence).

## New Music for Seasonal and Religious Festivals

Many of Deason-Barrow's choral works are festival compositions paced by the rhythms and moods of nature. They have been inspired by the need to help people recover a sense of participation and attunement with the spiritual forces underlying each season and religious festival. Thus, he uses the moods /soundscapes of different scales (e.g. 'I thank you God' in the Lydian Mode), tunings and instrumental materials - e.g. Bronze vs. Iron gongs - as a wonderful means of creating harmony with the mood of each season/festival.



## Mystery, Revelation and Ecstasy in Music

'There must be some quality in art that carries me beyond my expectations, to place me for a moment before a reality that is prior to all my categories, antipathies or allegiances' (T.A.Clark).

At the heart of Deason-Barrow's music is a celebration of the mysteries of the universe. Thus he often employs the oceanic sounds of the tam tam, the primordial sound of huge shamanic bass drums and ancient bronze-age lurs/trumpets (e.g. In 'The Eye of the Great God'), the mysterious sounds of Tibetan Bells, and an extraordinary new instrument - a psaltery played with 2 bows - which is tuned to 2 intersecting whole-tone scales a semi-tone apart which enables the eternal sphere of free improvised 12-tone melodies to ring out.

Just as significantly in this connection, he asks, 'where in today's sacred music can we find examples of composers, such as Messiaen, whose music gives voice to the stories of prophetic revelation and miraculous transformation found in all spiritual traditions?' For Deason-Barrow the need to create music that expands our perception beyond the limits of our individual beliefs and understanding is paramount. Thus his music frequently defies the norms of musical expression as it seeks to give birth to a sense of transcendence (e.g. through the use of extended voice techniques - such as men singing falsetto or singing harmonics - or harmonies that defy categorisation, such as improvised micro-tones.) In short, his music is attuned to Sister Wendy Beckett's words,

'Contemplating contemporary art is a sort of prayer, a reaching out beyond the narrowness of our limitations'.

## Sounds in Space and Sounds in Movement

Sacred spaces - such as cathedrals - enhance our sense of space through inviting us to open up to something more than ourselves. Deason-Barrow's choral music frequently offers singers the exciting opportunity to explore how the musical structure/architecture of a composition can be enhanced through the spatial placement, movement and choreography of both singers and instrumentalists.

These compositions demonstrate a new paradigm in music making where the composed space of the music - e.g. its ranges, durations and pitch-spans - are inspired by the architecture and the sonic structure of the sacred spaces where the music is being sung. Music is thus heard from above, behind, below and in front, as well as in the periphery of buildings where playing on the edge of the

audible - or on the edge of gongs - creates a reaching out, in contrast with groups of musicians playing in the centre of gongs or singing in the centre of sacred space. (e.g. *'GOD HELP US TO CHANGE'* uses mysterious scales that gradually unfold their soundscapes through the whole length of the building - e.g. a cathedral nave - in what amounts to an glorious and innovative symbolic use of space).

### **New Sacred Instruments: New Listening**

A further controversial issue that finds a new response in Deason-Barrow's compositions is the totally new way of using instruments he has introduced as part of sacred choral musicing. Up until recently the organ has been the main instrument used in church worship (apart from West Gallery bands where different instruments were used to support each different voice parts). Now, today, the use of electronic instruments in worship bands is increasingly being advocated, firstly as a more participatory way of using instruments, and secondly as a way of linking sacred music to the prevailing musical culture of today.

Deason-Barrow, however, brings a totally new response to this issue through the use of newly designed acoustic instruments which can be played by non-specialists. These instruments include bronze gongs, bells and huge lurs (trumpets) - which are all designed to be played in movement - as well as new forms of string instruments (including string fields, tone harps, lyres, psalteries and bowed instruments with sympathetic strings and sitar-like bridges). All of these instruments can be tuned to different scales (e.g. the pure tuned overtone scale) - whilst 12-Tone circles of chime bars and the 12-Tone psaltery enable circles of participants to experience how the full pleroma and vibrancy of musical space available to Western musicians, namely the 12 tone scale, inspire a new consciousness of tone and the mysteries of creation to come about. In addition, Deason-Barrow often uses instruments such as the tam-tam, etc. to symbolise more eternal and primordial aspects of music (see above).

### **Contemporary Sacred Music for Amateur Musicians**

A key belief underlying his sacred choral music is that amateur musicians and community groups need access to the new musical paradigms of our time, but in music that is not technically alienating. (N.B. Much contemporary music has become so virtuosic that only professionals can play/sing it.) What is needed, he strongly advocates, is new sacred music which can be convincingly played/sung by amateurs that manifests how **'the Voice of Eternity can be heard sounding anew in the musical language of our time'**.

### **New Elements that appear in his music includes the following:**

- the use of intervals such as 2nds, 7ths and 9ths
- harmonies created out of clusters of 2nds derived from different scales/modes
- drones - and chords which act as drones - which appear in the upper voices so that the music hangs down from the heavens, as well as growing upwards from the earth, as happens with more traditional bass drones
- the use of melodic auras where each note of a melody is sung and sustained by different singers standing in different locations so that a chord slowly unfolds around the building like a bud opening into full flower
- extended voice techniques, e.g. the use of overtone singing, falsetto voicings, whispering, pitch glides, whistling and voice styles from other cultures
- the sounding of melodies in different octave transpositions
- the ritualistic and symbolic use of instruments, e.g. long gong and tam tam strokes, or sudden blasts of lurs played from the clerestory and the crypt.

### **Choral Meditations, Mantras and Prayers in Music**

A number of Deason-Barrow's choral pieces combine spoken prayers sounded over the backdrop of choral singing (e.g. *'GOD HELP US TO CHANGE'* and *'CANDLES'*). Other pieces call for choral repetitions of mantras, single lines of prayers and affirmations, to enable participants to intensify their experience of the text through contemplative repetition (e.g. *'MEDITATIONS IN SONG'* and *'COME HOLY SPIRIT'*). A further example of this is the breathing meditation sung to the archetypal overtone scale to the words *'BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD'*. Through composing music based upon the repetition of short but subtle musical structures, these choral meditations act as musical mantras to help free human minds and hearts for divine contemplation.

### **New Worlds of Time - 'A Glimpse of Eternity through the Window of Time'**

Much of our thinking about rhythm and time is centred on clock/ (E.Rautavaara) measured time and linear concepts of progress. Deason-Barrow's compositions, by contrast bring about different forms of temporal awareness often through the use of non-linear forms of time embracing cyclical, psychological, primordial and eternal aspects of time, including

**'the now that does not pass away'** (St. Augustine).

A key feature of these compositions is the inclusion of sacred chants in non-measured time drawn from different traditions such as Gregorian Chant (e.g. *'COME HOLY SPIRIT'* and *'THE SEVEN LAST WORDS'*) and the improvised singing of melodies in free improvised rhythms (e.g. *'MEDITATIONS IN SONG'*).