

A HYMN FOR MERCY 2018

EVALUATION

Thirteen composers submitted entries to the 2018 A Hymn for Mercy Competition.

All were submitted by the closing date of September 15. Judging took place October 8-15. There were three criteria for evaluating the merits of each composition: Musical, Textual, and Liturgical.

MUSICAL:

In general, standard of compositions was fairly high, considering the age limit (21 years or under) of the competition. Most of the pieces were motets for choir (some with organ or piano accompaniment). Three of the pieces were scored for SATB choir, and thus were not in keeping with the competition guidelines, and had to be discounted. Two pieces included a congregational response.

Some of the pieces showed inexperience in word-setting, with stresses placed on weaker syllables, or with repetition of weaker words. Occasionally words were split in an awkward manner. Range was, in general, suitable for the developing teenage voice; there were some notable difficult leads (in one case from a high Ab to middle C), which might work well in keyboard writing but is difficult and unsatisfying for voice. A few pieces displayed a substantial amount of crossing over. A number of pieces utilised a strong motif, but this was repeated without development during the piece.

Keyboard writing was usually good. Often the keyboard part would double the voices, or provide good support. Sometimes there was independence in writing, though usually this was where the vocal harmony was well-established and homophonic. In one piece, the keyboard part was very sparse, and provided no support for voices or independence within the structure of the piece. Just one composition included a line for optional C instrument; this was simple but well-written.

Style and idioms used ranged from baroque to contemporary. Homophonic as well as imitative contrapuntal writing was evident. A number of pieces displayed interesting adventurous discordant writing; one piece utilised *Sprechstimme*.

Most composers submitted typeset scores: these were clear and well-presented. Keyboard parts usually were correctly located underneath the choral parts. Handwritten music that was submitted was sent in scanned copies, which tended to be unclear and with errors. Presentation is important when submitting scores for publication or competition, and composers should be familiar with at least the basics of notation software such as Sibelius or Finale.

TEXTUAL:

Only six pieces had overt reference to Holy Spirit/Pentecost/Confirmation, in keeping with guidelines. Five pieces were entirely in Latin; one additional piece had a congregational response in Latin. The remainder were in English. Texts were drawn from a variety of sources in scripture or prayers of the church; only three used text from strophic hymnody. Overall, there seemed to be a lack of discernment in choosing texts – there are many hymns to the Holy Spirit, and the obvious references to the Spirit in Johannine or Pauline texts were absent. In liturgical music, text is at least equal to music, and there are several strophic hymn texts that are in the public domain that could have been used as inspiration for this competition.

LITURGICAL:

While all the pieces were suitable for use in liturgy, most were scored for choir, or choir with accompaniment. Just two included material for congregation. Choral pieces have their place in the Catholic liturgy – the most obvious being motets at communion or offertory, or as preludes before the liturgy. Some of the pieces, from a stylistic point of view, were deemed more suitable as concert pieces than liturgical music.

RESULTS:

In this instance, the judges felt that there was no piece that clearly deserved the first prize, based on all three criteria as outlined above. The guidelines and information provided at the announcement of the competition indicated that the composition should be suitable for use in liturgy, and would be sung by the Schola at St Joseph's Mercy Secondary School. Some of the pieces were not scored for the requisite forces, and some were deemed to be beyond the capabilities of the choir (although examples of current repertoire had been indicated).

However, one of the purposes of the competition was to encourage the work of young composers in writing music for the liturgy, and for this specific group. Thirteen composers submitted material that showed developing and emerging skills in writing for voices with/without keyboard, for use in liturgy. For this, each is to be commended and encouraged.

The judges felt that three pieces deserved special mention, with small prizes awarded to each of the composers:

Highly Commended:

<i>Veni Sancte Spiritus</i>	Pietro Cattaneo
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Commended:

<i>Hymn for Mercy</i>	Aram Shekikyan
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<i>Emitte Spiritum tuum</i>	Jeremy Tingle
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