

A Penitential Psalm

Miserere

Gregorio Allegri
(1582–1652)

for two choirs of mixed voices (SSATB/SATB)

Text: Psalm 51 from The Book of Common Prayer, 1976
realization by Carl Crosier

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Choral Score

CH-1023

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere* for nine voices in two choirs, sung annually in the Pontifical Chapel during Holy Week, is held to be one of the most beautiful compositions which has ever been dedicated to the service of the Church. There was a time when it was so much treasured that to copy it was a crime punishable with excommunication. There is a famous story that in 1770 Mozart took down the notes while the choir was singing it.

The harmonic structure of the fauxbourdons is quite simple. The success of the work depends almost entirely upon the manner of its performance and upon certain traditional "abbellimenti" (ornaments) which give a peculiarly pathetic quality to many passages. These traditional embellishments are incorporated in this publication.

There are a number of excellent editions of this work which use the original Latin text as well as English texts of the Psalm from the King James Version of the *Holy Bible* or the English *Book of Common Prayer*. The present edition employs the text from the American *Book of Common Prayer*, 1976.

This published version is intended for liturgical use on Ash Wednesday, during Lent or Holy Week. Certain verses may be omitted to accommodate the particular situation.

I offer the following possibilities for performance: The entire psalm may be sung by a mixed choir using four solo voices for the alternate choral verses; the chant and five part verses may be sung by a mixed choir from the choir stalls, and the four part verses by a smaller second choir (or solo voices) from another location, either inside or outside of the church; an additional group of unison voices may sing the chant verses from a third location.

A successful performance of Allegri's masterwork will depend on securing a solo soprano voice able to sing the high C's with sensitivity and consistency. Other competent singers are also required for the execution of the ornaments in the lower parts as well.

Miserere is especially effective when sung in semi-darkness at the conclusion of a penitential service. It offers a unique opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the powerful text of the psalm. At its conclusion, all should leave in silence.

Carl Crosier
Editor

Introductory notes compiled from *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

A Penitential Psalm
MISERERE MEI, DEUS

Fauxbourdons by
GREGORIO ALLEGRI
with traditional abbellimenti after Alfieri and Rockstro

Text: Psalm 51
The Book of Common Prayer, 1976

realization by **CARL CROSIER**

VERSE 1 (Choir I)

SOPRANO I *mf* Have mercy on me, O God, have mer - cy,

SOPRANO II *mf* Have mercy on me, O God, have mer - cy,

ALTO *mf* Have mercy on me, O God, have mer - cy,

TENOR *mf* Have mercy on me, O God, have mer - cy,

BASS *mf* Have mercy on me, O God, have mer - cy,

mp according to your loving - kind - ness;

mp according to your loving - kind - ness;

mp according to your loving - kind - ness; ac - cord - ing to your lov - ing

mp according to your loving - kind - ness; ac - cord - ing

mp according to your loving - kind - ness; ac - cord - ing

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ac - cord - ing to your lov - ing - kind - ness;

your lov - ing - kind - ness;

kind - ness;

to your lov - ing - kind - ness;

to your lov - ing - kind - ness;

mf *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

VERSE 2

Cantors:

In your great com - pas - sion blot out my of - fen - ses.



VERSE 3 (Choir II)

SOPRANO I *mp* Wash me through and through from my wick -

SOPRANO II (ALTO) *mp* Wash me through and through from my

TENOR *mp* Wash me through and through from my wick -

BASS *mp* Wash me through and through from my wick -

ed - ness and cleanse me from my

wick - ed - ness and cleanse me from my

ed - ness and cleanse me from my

ed - ness and cleanse me from my

p *p* *p* *p*

sin, from my sin. *mf* *p*

sin, from my sin. *mf* *p*

sin, from my sin. *mf* *p*

sin, from my sin. *mf* *p*

VERSE 4

Cantors:

For I know my trans-gres-sions, and my sin is ever be-fore me.



VERSE 5 (Choir I)

Against you only have I sinned and done what is e - vil in your sight. *mf* *f* *mf*

Against you only have I sinned and done what is e - vil in your sight. *mf* *f* *mf*

Against you only have I sinned and done what is e - vil in your sight. *mf* *f* *mf*

Against you only have I sinned and done what is e - vil in your sight. *mf* *f* *mf*

Against you only have I sinned and done what is e - vil in your sight. *mf* *f* *mf*

And so you are justified when you speak and up - right *mf*

And so you are justified when you speak and up - right *mf*

And so you are justified when you speak and up - right in your judg - *mf*

And so you are justified when you speak and up - right in your *mf*

And so you are justified when you speak and up - right in your *mf*

in your judg ment.

f in your judg ment. *p*

f in your judg ment. *p*

f judg ment. *p*

f judg ment. *p*

judg ment.

VERSE 6

Cantors:

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my moth-er's womb.

VERSE 7 (Choir II)

mf For behold, you look for truth deep with in

mf For behold, you look for truth deep with

mf For behold, you look for truth deep with in

mf For behold, you look for truth deep with in

p me, and will make me understand wis - dom

p in me, and will make me understand wis - dom se -

p me, and will make me understand wis - dom

p me, and will make me understand wis - dom

se - cret - ly. *mf* *p*

se - cret - ly. *mf* *p*

se - cret - ly. *mf* *p*

se - cret - ly. *mf* *p*

VERSE 8

Cantors:

Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean in-deed.



VERSE 9 (Choir I)

Make me hear of joy and glad - ness, *f*

Make me hear of joy and glad - ness, *f*

Make me hear of joy and glad - ness, *f*

Make me hear of joy and glad - ness, *f*

Make me hear of joy and glad - ness, *f*

that the body you have bro - ken may re - *mf*

that the body you have bro - ken *mf*

that the body you have bro - ken may re - joice, *f*

that the body you have bro - ken may re - joice, *f*

that the body you have bro - ken may re - joice, *f*

joyce, may re - joyce.

may re - joyce, may re - joyce.

may re - joyce.

may re - joyce.

may re - joyce.

p

VERSE 10

Cantors:

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my in-iq-ui-ties.



VERSE 11 (Choir II)

mp Create in me a clean heart, O

mp Create in me a clean heart,

mp Create in me a clean heart, O

mp Create in me a clean heart, O

p God, and renew a right spir - it

p God, and renew a right spir - it with -

p God, and renew a right spir - it

p God, and renew a right spir - it