5-2017

Restoration: An Oratorio Based on Ezra and Nehemiah

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Restoration
An Oratorio based on Ezra and Nehemiah

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Composition

by
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Ouachita Baptist University
Bachelor of Music in Church Music, 2009

May 2017
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

In beginning a project of this scope, I first spent months considering the genre in which I wanted to work. Once I committed to an Oratorio, more months were spent reading and finding the story I needed to tell and the orchestral medium through which to tell it. Thus began Restoration, an oratorio based on the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. I came to this story for several reasons: first, though comprising a unique moment in Old Testament history, it has not been told through music. More importantly, I believed that the themes of this story were ones that needed to be told today: people returning from exile to rebuild their homes and their lives. I sensed in their narrative some of the same cultural issues facing our world now: the question of isolationism on a social and political scale, the oppression of people because of belief, and the overarching issue of philosophical worldview put into action.

Because of this, I was not content to simply retell the story: something more needed to be said. Why should this story matter in twenty-first century America? Thus I created a third soloist, Sarah, who would represent the modern voice seeking to learn what lessons she could from the experience of Ezra and Nehemiah and apply those lessons in her own context.

Musically, this led me to personify each character. For Ezra, a scribe grounded in the Law, I chose to use a Baroque or early classical operatic style. Nehemiah, a public servant more willing to speak his mind, brought to my mind the nuanced musical character of the Romantic period. Sarah, the frustrated, realist voice of the twenty-first century, fit best into the genre of spoken poetry. I chose a smaller orchestra featuring strings, winds, and percussion. Between these various instruments the accompaniments could be created for any of the musical spirits of the characters.
Finally came the choir. Functioning most as the traditional Greek chorus, the choir varies from representing the population as a whole in the story to providing an objective, third-party commentary on the narrative.

Fiat pax!
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Restoration
An Oratorio based on Ezra and Nehemiah

The Ensemble

Ezra (baritone)
Nehemiah (tenor)
Sarah (soprano)

SATB Chorus

Flute I & II
Oboe I & II
Bb Clarinet I & II
Bassoon I & II
Horn in F I & II
Bb Trumpet I & II
Trombone I & II
Timpani
Percussion
Violin I & II
Viola
Cello
Bass
I. Urbe Fracta Est

Chorus

<table>
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<th>Latin Vulgate, Lamentations 1.1</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Urbe fracta</td>
<td>The city having been broken</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacrimamus</td>
<td>Let us cry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sine spe sumus</td>
<td>We are without hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quomodo sedit sola civitas plena populo</td>
<td>Once the city sat filled with people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facta est quasi vidua domina gentium</td>
<td>She, was was seen as queen of the nations, is broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeps provinciarum fracta est</td>
<td>The first citizen of the provinces is broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et facta est serva¹</td>
<td>and she is made a slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sine spe sumus, populi urbis magnae</td>
<td>We, the people of the great city, are without hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sine spe sumus, populi nunc sine patria</td>
<td>We, the people now without a homeland, are without hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbs nostra, quae regina provinciarum erat, nunc est in ruinis</td>
<td>Our city, which was the queen of the provinces, is now in ruins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plorans ploravit in nocte²</td>
<td>Wailing she lamented in the night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacrimis in oculis eius.</td>
<td>with tears in her eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemo eam curat.</td>
<td>No one cares for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sine spe sumus, populi urbis magnae</td>
<td>We, the people of the great city, are without hope</td>
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Ezra and Nehemiah:
The city is destroyed
We the people cry- we are without hope

¹ Latin Vulgate, Lamentations 1.1
² Latin Vulgate, Lamentations 1.2
**Chorus:**

| Sine spe sumus, populi urbis magnae | We, the people of the great city, are without hope |
| Sine spe sumus, populi nunc sine patria | We, the people now without a homeland, are without hope |
| Urbs nostra, quae regina provinciarum erat, nunc est in ruinis | Our city, which was the queen of the provinces, is now in ruins |

**Ezra and Nehemiah:**

We the people of the great city are without hope
We the people now without a homeland, are without hope

**Chorus:**

| Nunc est in ruinis | Now it is in ruins |

**Sarah:**

I look around, see a world in devastation.
All across the board it’s nation against nation.
People are scared, they’re oppressed and abused:
the rules are changed every day, no wonder they’re confused.
We’re a people without a home to call our own:
no place to run and hide, no tranquility inside
of our minds. We need something to give real soon
before the world as we know it is ashes and ruins.

**Chorus:**

| Sine spe sumus, populi urbis magnae | We, the people of the great city, are without hope |
| Sine spe sumus, populi nunc sine patria | We, the people now without a homeland, are without hope |
| Urbs nostra, quae regina provinciarum erat, nunc est in ruinis | Our city, which was the queen of the provinces, is now in ruins |

**Sarah:**

Before the world as we know it...
Ezra and Nehemiah:
We the people of the great city are without hope
We the people are now without a country, without a home

Chorus:
Nunc est in ruinis  Now it is in ruins

II. Decree

Ezra:
Our people were removed, taken from our homes to a new land while our city burned.
Our treasures: carried by our oppressors as a tribute to their king.
Seventy years we wept as captives in Babylon,
until she too fell into the hands of Cyrus, the Persian king.
The king decreed:

Chorus (tenor soli):
God has given me the kingdoms of the world.
His anointing and provision inspire me to rebuild.
We’ll start with His Temple in Jerusalem.
Let His people return with supplies for the work.
May God be with you!

Chorus (tutti):
The Lord be with us!

Ezra:
Thus the chiefs of the people, the priests and the Levites, returned home!

Chorus:
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

III. Opposition

Ezra:
Thus the people returned and our work began.
Assembled as one, a plan we devised to restore the Temple and our way of life.
We rebuilt the foundations!
Chorus:
We rebuilt our foundations
Our call to celebration!

Ezra:
Our joy was expressed through both exclamations and tears:
the sounds mingled as one song of praise to God, the Hope of our people.

Nehemiah:
Then men of the province came forth to help.
They who were our enemies now claimed to seek our God though their heart was pledged to
another.
They sought to subvert us: they sent a letter to the king, accusing us as rebels with the intent to
wage war once we had rebuilt our home and restored our customs.

Ezra:
An edict was made that construction should cease.
We were forced so to do as soldiers stilled our hands and idle hands stilled our hearts

Nehemiah:
They stopped us cold for fifteen years

Chorus:

| Nunc est in ruinis | Now it is in ruins |

Nehemiah:
until the second year of Darius, who declared:

Chorus (alto and bass):
As Cyrus decreed the Temple built, this work has been unjustly delayed too long.
Let it be completed now without delay or further disruption.
Leave the people to their work.

Chorus:
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
IV. Prayer

Chorus:

| Hierusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas (civitates ascendent) | Jerusalem which is made so that the citizens (that the citizens may ascend) |
| cuius participatio eius in id ipsum | united together may share in it |
| Illic enim ascenderunt tribus, tribus Domini, testimonium Israhel ad confitendum nomini Domini | Indeed in that place the tribes ascend, the tribes of the Lord, the testimony of Israel in confession of the Lord’s name |
| Rogate quae ad pacem sunt Hierusalem et abundantia diligentibus te | Ask for the peace of Jerusalem and the prosperity of those who love her: |
| Fiat pax in virtute tua et abundantia in turribus tuis | May peace be in your strength and abundance in your walls |
| Propter fratres meos et proximos meos loquebar pacem de te | On behalf of my brothers and my neighbors I will speak peace concerning you |
| Propter domum Domini Dei nostri quaesivi bona tibi | On behalf of the house of the Lord our God I sought good things for you |

V. Lifeless

Sarah:
In every generation there has been organization spending untold fortunes to build fortifications and even more in adorning ornamentation, which makes us wonder: What the hell?!?
A building is just that: a building. And often they fall into disuse and ruin.
The system exploits, taking more than it needs for its own damn benefit, not that of those it leads.
Why exist if you don’t have a purpose? Why waste the time, the effort, the fortune?
A body without a spirit is lifeless.

Nehemiah:
How true!
The Temple was meant to be the dwelling of God, the heart of our people.
Though the House stood complete, incomplete was our community.

Ezra:
In the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, a scribe well-versed in Law, returned home, tasked by the King to appoint judges according to the wisdom of God given to me.

---

3 Latin Vulgate, Psalm 122.3-4, 6-9
Chorus:

| Virga peccatorum super sortem iustorum non relinquetur | The rod of sinners will not be left behind above the destiny of just men |
| Virga peccatorum super sortem iustorum non reget | The rod of sinners will not rule over the destiny of just men |
| ut non extendant iusti ad iniquitatem manus suas | that the just may not extend their own hands towards iniquity |

Ezra and Nehemiah:
The scepter of evil will not rule over us!
Oh that we, the just, may not extend our hands unjustly.
Let us not extend our hands.

Sarah:
All our best intentions.

Chorus:

| Qui confidunt in Domino sicut mons Sion non commovebitur in aeternum et Dominus in circuitu populi sui | Those who confide in the Lord are like mount Zion which will not be moved throughout eternity And God will surround his people |

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Sarah:
All our best intentions.

Chorus:

| Pax super Israel | Peace over Israel |

VI. Remedy

Sarah:
We claimed to be people of God, a great nation, but we chose to lie, cheat, steal, deceive;
then to lead us we chose better liars and thieves.
They built up the system to benefit themselves, damning the rest of us, leaving us without help.
Crime and corruption don’t exist because of the tools that we have.
We entrusted those tools to liars and fools to make us safer than we were at the start,
but this shit continues on and on because crime and corruption are conditions of the heart.
Chorus:
Crime and corruption are conditions of the heart.

Nehemiah:
As our people once more found their strength,
we began to fix the wall, thinking it with our resolve would prevent another fall.

Sarah:
But a wall won’t protect you when the issue lies within:
none of our tools are able to stop our sin as a people to spread hate and division.
The only real remedy is unity of purpose and vision.

Ezra:
We turned our hearts toward the Lord, renewing our commitment to His Word:
obeying His statutes, fulfilling our vows.
As one we proclaim:

Ezra and Nehemiah:

| Dies sanctifactus est Domino Deo nostro. | The day is sanctified to the Lord our God. |

Nehemiah:
An ancient feast we observed according to the Lord’s command.
Hearts awaking, our song of praise was heard:

Chorus:

| Tu ipse Dominus solus | You alone are Lord |

Ezra and Nehemiah:
As one we cried.
Sarah:
As one we cry, we must understand: our fight is not against our fellow man
but against the darkness that stains our heart, making crime and corruption our skillful works of art.
We as a nation must return, if we are to stand, to faith and love for God and for our fellow man.
Now we stand in the fire, on the brink of ashes and ruin: with renewed conviction we must act soon.
Let us be stewards and neighbors and sons striving together for restoration

Chorus:

| Fiat pax!      | Let there be peace! |

Libretto and translation by Joshua Bland
with reference to Lamentations 1 and Psalm 122 of the Latin Vulgate
Cue following measures individually. Hold 15 seconds each.

1. First Group
"Urbe fracta est."

2.

3. Add Second Group
"Urbe fracta est."

Sarah

Nehemiah

Ezra

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Cello

Bass
4. Add Third Group
"Urbe fracta est."

5. Add Fourth Group
"Urbe fracta est."

A begin metered conducting
Urbe fracta est. Urbe! Si ne spe susum.

La - cri - ma - mus.

La - cri - ma - mus.
Play these pitches on the same drum, alternating as the sound decays.
Nehemiah (spoken): Quomodo sedit sola civitas plena populo. Facta est quasi vidua domina gentium. Princeps provinciarum fracta est et facta est serva.
Urbs nostra, quaeremus ciuitatem regiam, caesarum erat, nunc est in ruinis.

Dum nos nunc sita non est, dum non est, dum non est, dum non est, dum non est.
The city is broken.

We the people cry:
We are without hope.
We the people. It’s hopeless. We the people.

We the people of the great city are without hope. We the people are without a country.
Sarah

Neh

Ezra

S

A

T

B

Vln

Vln

Vla

Vc

CB

snare drum

without a home.

Nunc est in ruinis.

Nunc est in ruinis.

Nunc est in ruinis.

Nunc est in ruinis.

Nunc est in ruinis.
I look a-round, see a world in de-ve-sta-tion. All a-cross the board it's na-tion a- gainst na-tion.
People are scared, they're oppressed and abused; the rules are changed every day, no wonder they're confused. We're a
people without a home to call our own: no place to run and hide, no tranquility inside of our minds.
We need something to give real soon before the world as we know it is ashes and ruins.
P Play these pitches on the same drum, alternating as the sound decays

Before the world as we know it...

We the people.

It's hopeless.

We the people of the great city are without hope.
We the people without a home.

We the people are without a country, without a home.
Our people were taken from our homes to a new land while our city burned.
treasures: carried by oppressors as tribute to their king.
Seventy years we wept as captives in Babylon, un-till she too fell in-to the hands of Cyrus, the Persian king.
The king decreed:

- God has given me the kingdoms of the world.
- 

God has given me the kingdoms of the world.
His announcement and provision inspired me to rebuild. We'll start with His temple in Jerusalem. Let His people return with suspicion.

Fl
Ob
Cl
Bsn
Hn
Tpt
Tb
Tmp
Perc
Ezra
S
A
T
B
Vln
Vla
Cb
The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!
The Lord be with us!
May the Lord be with us!
May the Lord be with us!

The Lord be with us!
The Lord be with us!

Lord be with us!

God be with you!

The Lord be with us!
1. solo snare second time only
poco a poco cresc.
Thus the chiefs of the people, the priests and the Levites.
re-turned home!

To ful-fill our du-ty to the

To ful-fill our du-ty to the

king and to our God!
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
fl  
ob  
cl  
bsn  
hn  
tpt  
tb  
tmp  
perc  
ezra  
s  
a  
t  
b  
vln  
vln  
vla  
v  
bb  

19

play repeated section 3 times
cues second and third times only
second and third times only

king and to our God!
To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!
first time only
To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!


To ful fill our du ty to the king and to our God!
third time only: entire choir ecstatic chatter crescendo until end of repeated section
Thus the people returned, and our work began.
Assembled as one, a plan we devised to restore the Temple and our way of life. We re-
built the foundations!
We're accelerando.
built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
We re-built our founda-tions
Our call to celebration!

Our call to celebration!

Our call to celebration!

Our call to celebration!
Our joy was ex...
pressed through both exclamation and tears: the sounds mingled as one song of praise to
God, the Hope of our people.
The men of the province came forth to help.
They who were our enemies now claimed to serve our God though their heart was pledged to another.
They sought to subvert us: they sent a
Letter to the king.
spoken furiously
accusing us as rebels with the tent to wage war once we had rebuilt our home and re-
An edict was made that construction should cease. We were forced so to do as

stored our customs.
They stopped us cold for fifteen years—soldiers stilled our hands and idle hands stilled our hearts.

Nunc est in ruis.
un-til the se-cond year of Da-ri-us, who de-
accel.

As  Cy-ru-s de-cree-d  the
Temple built, this work has been unjustly delayed too long.
Let it be completed now without delay or further disruption. Leave the people to their...
To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
Fill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!

To fulfill our duty to the king and to our God!
fill our duty to the king and to our God!

fill our duty to the king and to our God!
In ev'ry generation there has been organization, spending untold fortunes to build fortifications and...
Sarah

Ezra

S

A

T

B

Vln

Vln

Vla

Vc

CB

ev-en more in a - dom-ing or-na-ment-a-tion which makes us won-der: What the hell?!?

A build-ing is just that: a build-ing. And
of ten they fall into disuse and m-in. The system exploits, taking more than it needs for its own damn be-ne-fit, not that of those it leads.
Why exist if you don't have a purpose? Why waste the time, the effort, the fortune? Spoken: A body without a spirit is lifeless.
How true! The Temple was meant to be the dwelling of...
God, the heart of our people.

Though the House stood complete, incom
I, a scribe well-versed in Law, returned home, tasked by the King to appoint judges according to the wisdom of...
God given to me.
The scepter of evil will...
vil will not rule us!  
Oh that we, the just, may not extend our hands unjust-
Let us not extend our hands.
All our best intentions.
We claimed to be people of God, a great nation, but we...
chose to lie, cheat, steal, deceiver; then to lead us we chose better liars and thieves. They built up the system to be no fit them-selves.
damning the rest of us, leaving us without help. Crime and corruption don't exist because of the
tools that we have. We en-trus-ted those tools to li-ars and fools to make us sa-fer than we were at the start, but this...
Crime and corruption are conditions of the heart.
people once more found their strength, we began to fix the wall, thinking it with our resolve would prevent another
But a wall won't protect you when the issue lies within: none of our tools are able to stop our sin as a fall.
people to spread hate and division. The only real remedy is unity of purpose and vision.

We turned our
hearts to-ward the Lord, re-new-ing our com-mit-ment to His Word.
bey-ing His stat-utes, ful-ling our vows. As one we pro-claim:
vamp: 15-20 seconds unconducted

Di - es sanc - ti-fac - tus est

Di - es sanc - ti-fac - tus est

Di - es sanc - ti-fac - tus est
Ancient feast we ob-
served according to the Lord’s command. Hearts awake, our song of praise was heard:

Tu ipse Dominus
As one we cried.

So lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

As one we cried.
a2 second time only

second time only

cues second time only

second time only

cues second time only

arco

ff

arco

ff

f
play 3 times

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus

Tu ip-se Do-mi-nus so-lus
As one we cry, we must understand: our fight is not against our fellow man but a -
gainst the dark-ness that stains our heart, ma-king crime and corrup-tion our skill-ful works of art. We as a na-tion must re-turn, if we-
are to stand, to faith and love for God and for our fellow man. Now we

play all on the same drum: adjust pedal slowly on beat 4

pizz.
stand in the fire, on the brink of ashes and ruin: with renewed conviction we must act soon.
Let us be stewards and neighbors and sons striving together for restoration.

Let pax!

Let pax!

Let pax!

Let pax!