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Music review: Deep Peace Songs / God be in My Head

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Music review by Angela Gorman

Collection 1

Deep Peace Songs, Litanies and Anthems

by Barbara Bridge

Published by OCP

Collection 2

God Be In My Head, Coral Anthems for the Church Year

Robert Farrell

Published by OCP

Published by OCP, these two collections have been recorded in the same studio, with almost the same musicians, singers, conductors and technical crew. The production quality of both collections is high, particularly the clarity of the choir and solo voices. This factor alone makes both collections worthy of our attention. It is clear that the composers have utilised many years of experience, dedicated ministry and great skill in compiling these beautiful recordings.

Upon deeper listening one is drawn to the themes of tranquillity and simplicity in collection 1. In these extremely challenging times amidst the pandemic of COVID-19, the lyrics and lilting melodies touch the soul. Phrases such as “deep peace to you,” “I will never forget you,” “Be still and know that I am God...” and “set us free from all our fear and anger, set us free to love,” would easily draw the singer, musician and listener into deeper prayer and reflection.

Collection 1 is a compilation of songs, litanies and anthems – written by Barbara Bridge over the span of 20 years. The Litanies would have direct application to a variety of liturgies across the Liturgical Calendar, together with additional application across a variety of prayer forms. With their repeated phrases throughout, they would be a simple addition to any parish choir repertoire. The Litany of Saints, for example, is a strong, relatively simple arrangement for the Easter Vigil. The metred responses for the assembly, together with the male/female cantor parts, creates vocal interest in what can be an otherwise difficult and lengthy litany. The other litanies in the collection – Litany of the Earth and Litany of Peace would be an excellent addition to parish and school repertoires. In fact, the applications for these litanies would be endless across a variety of school and parish liturgical and prayer settings.

The anthems and songs in *Deep Peace* would be easily accessible for most choirs. Experienced choirs would learn them quickly. Smaller music ministry groups would perhaps use these anthems and songs in unison with simple accompaniment, whereas SATB choirs would bring out the deeper beauty of the collection. The vocal range of every track is gracious and achievable. The fact that each piece of music includes at least 3 voices (SAT) means that an alternative line may be chosen, where the vocal range of the choir is limited. This is important in smaller parishes, where often there is no lead voice, only a musician, or sometimes voice/s only without musical accompaniment.

Additional applications for this collection would include prayer services, reconciliation liturgies, 'quiet' gatherings in churches and chapels and simply individual prayer and reflection. "Many songs include Taize-inspired chant, creating meditative atmospheres that promote personal prayer and reflection, with lyrical repetition that allows for introspection."¹

The lyrical simplicity of this collection gives it a compelling and intense character, drawing the listener into deeper union with God.

Collection 2 comprises twelve choral anthems for use throughout the Church's liturgical Seasons of Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, Easter as well as other liturgical and prayer celebrations. Composed by Robert Farrell, an accomplished organist and prolific composer, this - his first full-length collection with OCP - includes pieces published over the last ten years.²

Upon listening to these tracks, one is immediately captured by the beautiful arrangements containing challenging harmonies, strong organ accompaniment and surprising dissonance followed by peaceful resolution – almost causing one to *hold your breath* in anticipation.

Applications could be made across a variety of settings in Catholic music ministry. For the well-rehearsed SATB choir, accustomed to singing the traditional chant and choral style of Catholic liturgical repertoire, the collection contains 5 beautiful anthems for the Advent/Christmas season. With varying degrees of difficulty in vocal range and musical style, these tunes, once learnt, would no doubt become favourites for the choir and assembly. Farrell's version of *O Gladsome Light (Phos hilaron)* has obvious application for Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, but also, I would suggest, as a prelude or postlude to any liturgy. There are 4 anthems with directly quoted biblical text (*Peace I Leave with You, I Know That My Redeemer Lives, God So Loved The World* and *Remain in My Love*) making them suitable for their particular Sunday's in the liturgical year. These tunes mostly have keyboard accompaniment lines written, rather than organ, making them that little more accessible for the parish choir. However, with the vocal range often reaching up to E above middle C, some smaller choirs or assemblies, may struggle. The title track *God Be In My Head* arranged for SATB choir, could also be sung in unison and applied to the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Mass and other prayer services. The written organ accompaniment might also be played on keyboard/piano. It is a beautiful anthem with a haunting melody. The dynamics, including pauses and crescendos add to the impact of this anthem.

In summary, although quite complex in parts at first glance, this collection could have some successful application for large and small choirs at a parish level, with careful preparation and rehearsal. Cathedral choirs, together with more experienced choirs would find direct application of these beautiful anthems. An obvious addition to prayer services and private reflection, too, this is a solid collection, worthy of your

¹ *Deep Peace* Product Announcement Sheet, OCP, 2021

² *God Be In My Head*, product announcement sheet, OCP 2021

attention. One can well imagine the beauty of these anthems performed within the grand architecture, spaces and ambience of a cathedral.

These two collections are available through OCP. They come with CD and/or accompanying Octavo Packets at www.ocp.org
OCP products are distributed in Australia by Brumby Sunstate
(brumbysunstate.com.au) and in New Zealand by Pleroma Christian Supplies
(christiansupplies.co.nz)