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Music review

By Angela McCarthy

Annunciation Mass

Text: The revised Order of Mass, 2011

Music by Phil Murray

Self-published, Canberra, 2021

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Phil Murray has been engaged in liturgical music since the 1980s and has a very contemporary lyrical style. His guitar expertise is apparent in the recording in a way that is not dominant but suits the style of the music well.

The revised 2011 texts for the Roman Missal have been used for the Order of Mass as well as one sequence and the Angelus. It is not clear why he has included these as there is no commentary about the music.

Listening to the recording while reading the music it became obvious that the recording is not in the same key as the written music. This is perplexing as the recording is very singable and is 3 semi-tones below the written music. Phil's voice is excellent in this lower key but it is the same for congregations. Particularly with ageing congregations, hitting a high E is not welcome and sometimes not possible. Music for liturgy has to be hospitable as part of the pastoral judgement so perhaps a lower key, two semi-tones down would be better.

The *Lord Have Mercy* flows very well and the rhythm lends itself to the call and response format. In the written music the final phrase goes up to E and even though it gradually builds and it is only for a quaver, it is still too high for most congregations. The flow of the music harkens to Gregorian chant in a sense but is also very contemporary in its style.

Glory to God is a through composition which is what is intended liturgically. There is no repeated refrain. It is musically interesting but without much repetition it might take some time for a congregation to become familiar with the melodic variations. The chord sequences are interesting and flow beautifully. Phil has taken trouble to have the rhythm match the text which is very refreshing as that is not always the case.

Sequence is the sequence for Pentecost Sunday. Without any notes from the composer, it is not obvious why this is in the collection except that maybe it is required for his parish, the Canberra parish, Our Lady of the Annunciation. Once again, Phil has carefully matched the text (which is very ancient) with the rhythm of the music. The text has a particular metre that is repetitive and gentle, and the music matches it well. Phil has some interesting movements in the music with a series of key changes which will challenge some pastoral musicians, but it works well. Sequences are very ancient in the Catholic tradition going back to early Christian times when there were hymns that had particular metrical accents and numbers of syllables. Over time these became important but developed further in the ninth century. It was chanted after the Alleluia (now it is before the Alleluia). This is one of the places in the Middle Ages that the vernacular was used and the people allowed to sing and there were thousands composed.¹ There are currently only five sequences in use but the ones for Easter Sunday and Pentecost are obligatory.²

¹ Edward Foley, *From Age to Age* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2008), 209.

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *The Roman Missal*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (Vatican City, 2010), para. 64.

Some current Mass settings do not have gospel acclamations but Phil has provided three: and *Alleluia*, and two Lenten responses, *Glory and Praise* as well as *Glory to You*. They are easy to sing and again carefully match the text. There is musical interest in the phrasing and joy in the rhythm. It would have been good to include a chant for the verse that flowed easily from the response. Such chants can be very simple and therefore encourage the singing of each Sunday text which is strongly encouraged in Church documents.

Holy, holy, holy is very singable and has musical interest. There are musical phrases that are repeated and this works well. With acclamations in particular I prefer a shorter introduction so that the acclamation immediately follows the words of the presider but these introductions are short enough.

The *Memorial acclamations* are all present and the music is predictable and so will be easily learnt by any congregation. Phil's use of occasional syncopation makes it musically interesting with a contemporary sound.

Amen follows similar melody use as in previous parts of the setting and this is useful for a congregation and gives the setting a sense of unity. In the written music the final phrase goes up to D but on the word *Amen* that will not be too difficult. Still, it is much more singable in the recorded key.

Our Father uses similar melodic phrasing and rhythm and is very singable. The contemporary feel and repetitions make it very accessible. It is excellent that the doxology for the *Our Father* is included.

Lamb of God follows the same pattern and again, it is very accessible.

Angelus is included in the collection possibly because it is important in the parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation. Like *Glory to God* there are many variations in the melody, and it would take some time for a congregation to feel confident in singing it. However, the contemporary feel in the rhythms and melody could ameliorate that and welcome the singers.

Phil has done the recording himself with voice and instrumentals with the assistance of KV Productions in the audio engineering. It is easy to listen to and that will aid congregations to learn the melodies. Since he has written all the parts in C major or A minor, it is accessible to parish keyboardists and maybe they can use the transposition button to bring it down a couple of semi-tones to help the congregation! It is well produced and a good addition to a parish collection.