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Music review

By Mary-Anne Lumley

Annunciation Mass of St Catherine of Siena

Music by Lorraine Hess

Arranged by Ed Bolduc

Published by GIA Publications

‘Sing with reverence and boldness in honour of St Catherine of Siena’.¹

Catherine of Siena, who lived in the fourteenth century, was given the title of Doctor of the Church by Pope Saint Paul VI and later declared by Pope Saint John Paul II a co-patron of Europe. During Catherine’s life Europe was troubled by plague and ‘political upheaval’ and, according to Dominican Toby Lees, the Church was challenged because the ‘Bishop of Rome was absent from his See, residing in Avignon’.² Lees describes the extraordinary influence of this young woman – who died at age 33 – ‘from her ministry to the poor of Siena, to the profound effect she had on the political situation of the time, not least in using her influence to persuade Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome from Avignon’. Lorraine Hess, composer of *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena*, believes Catherine’s impact on the world, came from a life committed to deep prayer and a desire for serving others.

Hess is a mother, singer, music minister, recording artist and songwriter who resides in New Orleans where she is Director of Music Ministry at the Saint Catherine of Siena Parish. The [Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena](#), published by World Library Publications, a division of GIA, is billed as having ‘energy, drive, beauty, and reverence [which] works well within contemporary liturgies’.³ This setting is attractive and has a contemporary appeal due to the use of syncopation. The mass comprises musical settings for those parts of the Mass most usually sung in parishes: penitential act, glory to God, gospel acclamation, eucharistic prayer and Lamb of God. It includes the three eucharistic acclamations and a Lenten gospel acclamation. In her introductory notes, the composer suggests paying attention to the ‘deliberate tempo markings’, which include ‘gently’ in the penitential act to ‘lively with joy’ in the glory to God, indicating her sensibility for supporting the liturgical actions and words.

Composing a Mass setting presents a number of challenges. As well as accommodating the variable rhythms in non-strophic texts and adapting the mood to suit the liturgical action, the music needs to be singable, memorable, easily learned by an assembly – many of whom will not read music or view themselves as having a capacity to sing – and yet, not so easy that it becomes boring.

On the GIA website, the *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena* is rated as moderately easy. The setting has a number of features which ensure it is very accessible. Primarily, the melodic range rarely moves beyond

¹ Lorraine Hess, Notes, *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena*, [GIA Publications - Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena - Choral / Accompaniment edition \(giamusic.com\)](#), 2.

² Toby Lees, “St Catherine of Siena”, *Thinking Faith*, 28 April 2016 <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/st-catherine-siena> (accessed 7 May 2022)

³ Lorraine Hess, arr. Ed Bolduc, *Mass for Saint Catherine of Siena* (Chicago, GIA, 2022) [GIA Publications - Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena - Choral / Accompaniment edition \(giamusic.com\)](#)

the interval of a sixth – and specifically between D and B on the treble staff. Not only is the pitch range fairly small, it also sits within a vocal range that is comfortable for the majority of people.⁴ The pitch range is extended only minimally in the eucharistic acclamations, the great amen and the gloria. This will be an encouragement for the People of God to join in with singing.

Further features that make this setting very singable are that, apart from the eucharistic acclamations and the amen, the entry always begins on the same note, D, and the tune consistently follows a melodic motif, although the rhythm may vary. Additionally, each new section is introduced by a two-bar instrumental introduction, which is consistent throughout, except for the Lamb of God where the introduction is four bars. Such a sense of predictability in the music is helpful in enabling participation, especially by the assembly.

While contemporary ears are attuned to rhythmic variation and syncopation in music, it is this factor that gives *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena* a ‘moderately easy’ rather than ‘easy’ rating. While not difficult, the assembly will require strong music leadership while learning this setting of the mass. This is particularly the case in the gloria which, unlike some mass settings, does not have a refrain. That said, Hess makes judicious use of repetition which makes for ease of learning.

A particularly commendable feature is Hess’s arrangement for the Lamb of God. According to the General Instruction on the Roman Missal,

*The supplication Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is usually sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation replying; or at least recited aloud. This invocation accompanies the fraction of the bread and, for this reason, may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has been completed. The final time it concludes with the words grant us peace.*⁵

The Lamb of God in *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena* is clearly intended to reflect this instruction. Unlike many musical settings, Hess has only scored the words ‘Lamb of God ... have mercy on us’ once, after which the repeat sign is added. That is followed by a key change leading to the final ‘Lamb of God ... grant us peace’.⁶ Such an arrangement allows the first petition to be repeated for as long as needed during the breaking of bread while clearly indicating, with a key change, the final petition.

In the eucharistic prayer, a musical connection is established between the acclamation, which ends on a suspended dominant (A), resolving to the tonic (D) in the great amen. In this way, the integrity of the eucharistic prayer is reflected in the music.⁷

⁴ Figure 1 shows the starting note, the pitch range, the two-bar instrumental introduction and the melodic motif that begins most of the sung parts.

⁵ “The General Instruction of the Roman Missal” in *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed. (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010), sec. 83.

⁶ Refer to pages 28-30 of the choral/accompaniment score, [GIA Publications - Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena - Choral / Accompaniment edition \(giamusic.com\)](https://www.giamusic.com)

⁷ Figure 2 shows the last bars of the eucharist acclamation, ending on the dominant; Figure 3 shows the great amen beginning on the tonic.

FIGURE 1

Gospel Acclamation

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The figure displays a musical score for the Gospel Acclamation. It consists of three systems of staves. The top system is for the vocal line, marked 'Joyfully' with a tempo of quarter note = 126. It shows a two-bar instrumental introduction followed by the vocal entry on the note D. The lyrics 'Al - le - lu - ia.' are written below the notes. The middle system is for the piano accompaniment, marked 'mf', and shows the same two-bar instrumental introduction and vocal entry. The bottom system shows the continuation of the vocal line with the lyrics 'al - le - lu - ia.' and the piano accompaniment. A large 'PREVIEW' watermark is overlaid on the score.

FIGURE 2

Figure 2 shows a musical score for a vocal part and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The lyrics are: "rec-tion un-til you come a-gain." The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *rit.*, and chord symbols like G, A, and SUS4.

FIGURE 3

Figure 3 shows a musical score for a vocal part and piano accompaniment, titled "Great Amen". The score is for S.A. Assembly and includes a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 118$. The lyrics are: "men, a men." The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *rit.*, and chord symbols like D, G/B, A/C1, and GADD2/D. The score is marked with a large blue watermark.

It is noteworthy that Hess has not included a setting for the doxology before the great amen, as it is often redundant. Some presiders either do not read music or do not sing; many presiders use the chant setting to sing the doxology. Regardless of whether the chant is spoken or chanted, the predictability of the two-bar introduction can lead the assembly into confidently singing the great amen.

While this mass setting is attractive with unison voices, harmonies add richness and beauty. Musical arranger Ed Bolduc has added choral arrangements that are effective but simple, frequently combining upper and lower voices. On the other hand, there is no scoring for descant which might be seen as regrettable. While many parish choirs lack a balance of SATB singers, there is usually a high proportion of sopranos, many of whom are happy to sing descant which, if judiciously used, can enhance the liturgy. The scored piano accompaniment is accessible for keyboard players of average ability. For guitar players (or keyboard players who prefer to use chords) the key of D makes for chords that are easily playable. Separate editions for the assembly, guitar and choir with keyboard accompaniment will provide for the needs of many parishes or schools. Audio MP3 album of the mass may be purchased for download and is available [here](#).

Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena is a very 'practical' mass setting that appears to be born out of knowledge of the demands of the liturgy as well as musical experience with presiders, choirs and congregations. It's energy, beauty and contemporary appeal belie what appears to be deep knowledge, experience and careful thought ground in personal experience. Ten years on from the introduction of the New Translation of the Roman Missal, which saw an array of new and recycled musical settings, the *Mass of Saint Catherine of Siena* is a worthy addition. It is highly recommended for any parish or school seeking a new mass setting that is accessible and appealing.