

MOTHER OF GOD HERE I STAND

Sir John Tavener (1944-2013)

Based on a prayer by Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1842)

TEXT

Mother of God, here I stand now praying.
Before this ikon of your radiant brightness,
Not praying to be saved from a battlefield;
Not giving thanks, nor seeking forgiveness for the sins of my soul,
nor for all the souls
Numb, joyless and desolate on earth;
but for her alone, whom I wholly give you...

BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM NOTES

In 2000, Robin Griffith-Jones, Master of the Temple Church, and Stephen Layton, its then Director of Music and Organist, first met Tavener to discuss the possibility of a work which would place the Temple Church more firmly on the musical map. *"I had this feeling", says Layton, "that we needed to commission something absolutely extraordinary from Tavener, something that would be our calling card for the future - the thing, musically speaking, that people would remember as happening at the Temple Church."* The idea for the piece sprang from a remark that Tavener made to the Rev Robin Griffith-Jones and Stephen Layton: "I pointed out that at the time of the first millennium, AD1000, churches were full of all-night chanting, and said what a pity it was that modern Western music is so bereft of this," Tavener recalled. "They took me seriously!"¹

Tavener ultimately composed 'The Veil of the Temple', a score over 800 pages long in the form of an all-night vigil. The work had its premiere in July 2003.

¹ Layton, Stephen. "Sir John Tavener (1944 – 2013)." *Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra - New Zealand* / Stephen Layton, 2018, www.stephenlayton.com/sir-john-tavener-1944-%E2%80%93-2013.

"I regard The Veil of the Temple as the supreme achievement of my life and the most important work that I have ever composed".²

The words are based on a prayer by famous romantic Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1842), a contemporary of Pushkin who was heavily influenced by Lord Byron."³

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ORIGINAL COMPLETE PRAYER

Faithful before thee, Mother of God, now kneeling,
Image miraculous and merciful — of thee
Not for my soul's health nor battles waged, beseeching,
Nor yet with thanks or penitence o'erwhelming me!

Not for myself,— my heart with guilt o'erflowing —
Who in my home land e'er a stranger has remained,
No, a sinless child upon thy mercy throwing,
That thou protect her innocence unstained!

Worthy the highest bliss, with happiness O bless her!
Grant her a friend to stand unchanging at her side,
A youth of sunshine and an old age tranquil,
A spirit where together peace and hope abide.

Then, when strikes the hour her way from earth for wending,
Let her heart break at dawning or at dead of night —
From out thy highest heaven thy fairest angel sending
The fairest of all souls sustain in heavenward flight!⁴

RECORDINGS

Exultate Singers: [Mother of God Here I Stand](#)
UVa Chamber Singers: [Mother of God Here I Stand](#)

² Layton, Stephen. "Sir John Tavener (1944 – 2013)." *Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra - New Zealand* / Stephen Layton, 2018, www.stephenlayton.com/sir-john-tavener-1944-%E2%80%93-2013.

³ "Mother of God." *Wherwell Singers*. 2017. Accessed 25 May 2017. www.wherwellsingers.org/mother-of-god/.

⁴ "May 24 – A Prayer By Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov". (*Was A*) *A Deacon's Blog*. Accessed 25 May 2017. <http://konicki.com/blog2/2009/05/24/may-24-a-prayer-by-mikhail-yuryevich-lermontov/>

ANALYSIS

Key: G Major

Meter: Mixed; With bars as long as 16 beats, essentially time signatures are used in this piece mainly to organize the music horizontally –the feel should be chant-like, while the time signatures hold the harmonies together.

Texture: homophonic, homorhythmic

Structure: Strophic. (Three verses + coda)

Verse 1	Verse 2	Verse 3	Coda
ms 1-5	ms 6-10	ms 11-16	ms 17-18
Two contrasting phrases a b	same as Verse 1	same as Verse 1	phrase a only – ending on tonic
What makes the structure interesting is that first phrase ends on tonic, while the second phrase in each verse ends on the dominant			