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**A.M.D.G.**

February 11, 2020  
Our Lady of Lourdes

Dear Friend,

I hope all is well.

**Mark Donnelly** here. You probably know that music has been a big part of my professional life. During the past forty years, I've not only sung in opera and on the concert stage, but earned the nickname "Mr. O Canada" for the way I sing the Canadian national anthem. **Tripping on a carpet, while singing the anthem AND skating, garnered me over 3.3 million views on Youtube.**

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRHoPL0WtdM\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRHoPL0WtdM)

I have also conducted elementary, high school and college choirs, barbershop choruses, have been a dramatic and music director for many stage productions, and a private voice instructor.

Despite all of this, the one musical constant in my life has been singing and conducting Gregorian Chant and sacred polyphony of the classical Roman School, mostly for the Catholic Church. I've also composed vocal music, off and on, for the same period of time, but more intensely for the last ten years. (That is, as intensely as I can, given that my wife Catherine and I have nine children.) I've written classical art songs, hymns, psalm settings, and LOTS of polyphony! (more on that later)

Now, after much prayer, discernment, and having produced dozens of choral works, I feel God has called me to compose music full-time. Specifically, sacred music.

### **Why am I writing to you today?**

Well, this letter is about a ***grand vision, a grand vision I hope YOU share, – and it is also about asking for your help – your prayers and your financial support.***

Recently, Catherine and I were talking about *why I compose sacred music*. It was a curious conversation; after thirty years of marriage she has a pretty good idea of *why I do it*. Yet, after the simple (but TRUE) response: ***For the greater glory of God & the sanctification of souls***, the answer gets a little bit more complicated.

As time would have it, a couple of days later, Henry, a friend and mentor of mine, said, “Your music is **NOT ONLY GOOD, BUT VITAL! You have to get it out there.** People gotta hear it! *And not just in your parish.*” This echoed what a local pastor told me several years ago (after hearing my Missa “*Sicut cervus*”), “**Your music doesn’t do anyone any good if nobody knows about it!**”

As I said earlier, I’ve been doing this for decades, primarily as a parochial musician. All I’ve ever wanted to do was provide beautiful music for the Mass. I’ve written other stuff along the way, but church music has always been my focus and love. In my heart, I *know* I do it for *the greater glory of God & the sanctification of souls.* **Or do I?** Have I been **thinking** about me or **about you**; about the **faithful (even all of society) at large?** *Have I been keeping my light under a bushel?*

***Since I’m writing to you, I guess my answer to this last question is: YES!***

Obviously, since I’ve been composing for so long, *I think it’s important.* ***My goal in this letter is to see if you think it’s important!*** At least, important enough for you to offer your prayers and financial support. To that end, let me try to answer the question which prompted Catherine’s and my discussion: ***Why do I write sacred music?*** To answer fully, I think it breaks down into three more pointed questions:

- 1. Why do I write sacred music THE WAY I DO?**
- 2. Is Henry correct: Is it VITAL?**
- 3. Is it really ANY GOOD?**

1. Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Ratzinger) said in 2002 that “Christian art today is caught between two fires:” 1) the *cult of the ugly*, which rejects beauty as truth, and 2) the *deceptive beauty*, which does not bring human beings out of themselves toward the Divine, but only stirs up a desire for power and pleasure; a desire **to possess** things and others, rather than **be possessed** by Truth and Goodness.

In short, the Christian artist today must be vigilant in rejecting the **ugly** while embracing **true beauty**; not the **deceptive beauty** which cultivates inwardness, leading to narcissism and selfishness.

Taking the lead from **St. Pius X** (*Tra le sollecitudini, 1903*), the formula seemed easy: **The more my sacred music is like Gregorian Chant and classical Roman Polyphony, the better suited it is for Mass, and, thus, more likely to “bring human beings out of themselves toward the Divine.” So that’s what I did, and continue to do.**

## **So, HOW do I do this? Traditional Functional Harmony!**

Here's a **super simple way to understand Functional Harmony**:

**From the beginning of a piece of music, every note and chord leads the listener, in an unconscious way, to the end of the piece.**

The degree of skill and inspiration of the composer determines how well he or she succeeds in producing something people *want* to listen to.

Here's a **slightly more involved way to understand Functional Harmony**:

**Pretty well every note and chord has its purpose; it has a *function* in the greater whole of a given work, as it proceeds from beginning to end.**

This is how Palestrina and Mozart composed. It took centuries to refine.

However, after Beethoven died (d. 1827), and all the way up to the present day, most composers write notes and harmonies in an increasingly ***non-functional*** way, creating music that is either 1) dissonance without resolution (an extreme example being atonal music) or 2) harmonies primarily intended to create an *ambience*, resulting in a dreamy, sentimental or melancholy disposition in the listener; as with Romantic (19th century), jazz and pop music.

The latter of these can be affecting or pretty, but it is not always conducive to bringing the listener out of himself (for example, *As Time Goes By*, *Yesterday*, *Every Breath You Take*; need I go on?!). It is music that fosters what St. Augustine refers to as an "***incurvatus in se***," a ***turning inward upon oneself*** rather than outward toward God and others. This is Benedict XVI's second fire, the "*deceptive beauty*;" it fails to edify and elevate the listener.

Sadly, when composers use these more ***modern compositional techniques in church music***, they can ***rob their listeners of a truly edifying or elevating experience***. To avoid this tragedy, **I reject these techniques in my liturgical music**. (I can use them, and sometimes do, *sparingly*, in my secular compositions, BUT NOT FOR CHURCH.) I see **functional notes and harmony as integral to my liturgical music**, because it is this compositional practice that can most effectively lead people out of themselves and point them heavenward.

*For me, it always gets back to this: **leading souls to God!***

**2. Is it VITAL?** I see someone's hand up in the back. Yes? Your question is:

Mark, I get why you write the way you do, but **with all the great sacred music already available, why bother spending time & energy creating new stuff, AND asking for my money, which I could give to other worthy causes?**

To answer this entirely valid question, I'm going to turn, again, to the wisdom of **Benedict XVI** and also *another current Catholic scholar*. Benedict said, in 2010

**“An art that has lost the living root of transcendence would not be oriented to God... And a faith that had art only in the past would no longer be faith in the present.”**

In other words, ***for the faith to remain current, we cannot simply rely on the past for our artistic expression. We must have art, which is an expression of the eternal truths of the faith, but created now.*** We see that with the other arts. Why should music be different?

***Cantate Domino canticum novum!***

*Sing ye to the Lord a new song!*

*(Psalm 97:1)*

Just as the sublime music of William Byrd was undoubtedly a product of the dark times for the Catholics of Elizabethan England, so also, I think, **we need a musical expression of the Faith in our current times of turmoil and apostasy.**

***A music in these times but not of them.***

*(cf. 1 John 2:15-17)*

[Dr. Roberto de Mattei](#), author, historian, and president of the [Lepanto Foundation](#) has said,

**“Tradition grounds the past, present, and future in timelessness. [And]...it is only through Tradition that our present can have a future.”**

This means ***everyone of us needs new music grounded in tradition (not only as source but, I think, in discipline also); a shield & sword to combat the evils specific to today, as an aid to moving forward in Faith & Truth.***

***Now to the final, but just as important question:***

### 3. IS MY MUSIC ANY GOOD?

Now comes the toughest part of this letter to write; it's where I say,

“The quality of my music is **worthy of your prayers and material support.**”

I'm of the mind that most artists are not the starting point of their creations. To the ancient Greeks, the *Muses* were the source of inspiration. To me, this inspiration is exactly that: an *in-spiring*; that is, the *Holy Spirit* moving me to write what I do. Yes, I have a degree in music and a lot of experience, but that simply gives me the tools, the judgment and skill, to properly use that inspiration.

I believe, in the *Pauline sense*, it's **my charism**, my “discernment of the Spirit” with regard to composing (cf. 1Cor. 12:7-11), that **makes my music GOOD**.

It's humbling, and may even seem presumptuous, to think this. Believe me, it would be easy to deny that my talent for composing is *a gift from God*, and that *He* wants me to use it for *His* service. Yes, it does feel presumptuous.

So I've included the following **verification from others**. Their thoughts **may help you in justifying your support**; *but they also help bolster my commitment, knowing that what I'm doing is considered worthwhile.*

*“I wanted my mother's funeral mass to inspire and awaken her family and friends to the depth of mystery, beauty and truth of the Catholic faith. With this hope in mind, I asked Mark Donnelly if he would sing his Requiem Mass [for Soprano & Tenor (2015)] for mom's funeral.*

*“The performance by Mark and his daughter, Colleen, **gave one reason to believe that there is a God.**”*

- **Gemma Cowhig**, Holy Family Parishioner, Vancouver, BC

*“After receiving communion and returning to my pew, I heard this **luminous music** [O Sancta Trinitas ( 2019)]! I wanted to know who the composer was, thinking it was Palestrina or one of his contemporaries. After consulting the bulletin, I was blown away to see that it was written by our own choir director, Mark Donnelly!”*

- **Mazoe Kaufman**, professional sacred artist

Further I have, for some time now, been advised and encouraged to follow through on my discernment to make this a full time vocation – an apostolate.

*“Mark Donnelly's liturgical motets are truly beautiful and very well written for all voices. They **hearken back to the Renaissance in style, though at times one can sense they are written in this century...** This well crafted music was certainly written with love and devotion; I would be very happy to have my choir sing this music at my parish!”*

- **Peter-Anthony Togni**, award-winning composer, conductor, performer, broadcaster [[peterogni.com](http://peterogni.com)]

*"Mark's work is of the highest quality. **More people need to hear his music. It will change and move them in a very positive way.** Beautiful music, extremely well-crafted."*

- **Peter Allen**, award-winning composer for film & television [[peterallanassociates.com/site/](http://peterallanassociates.com/site/)]

*“I have experienced Mark’s sacred music for many years. In both spirit & quality, he is truly keeping the great Catholic musical tradition alive. His composing is certainly **worthy of any and all patronage and support.**”*

- **Most Rev. J. Michael Miller**, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver, BC

So, as I said at the beginning, with much thought and prayer, *I’ve decided to sally forth! **Will YOU join me on this MISSION, on this ENDEAVOUR?!***

Catherine and I have nine children, all singers, who love using their talent to serve Our Lord in the sacred liturgy. My whole adult life has been devoted to singing and conducting liturgical music. Writing music has been part of this for many years, but **now it is time to make composing the focus of my musical life!**

To do so, I need to gather a group of individuals **who’ve been fighting the good fight, who think this is a good idea AND is worthy of support**. Aside from writing more sacred music, we have some great projects in mind to help spread the word (or music, as the case may be). The work on the first projects, three music videos and a trailer, has already begun. February 1<sup>st</sup> was a magnificent day of singing, recording and filming! We are in the process of mastering and editing.

**What our team needs now are PATRONS keen on keeping this ambitious ENTERPRISE going! I sincerely hope YOU are among them!**

***I've been plugging away at this for years.*** (*I've put in Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours!*) But we've all been plugging away for years. ***I'm inviting you to join me, so we can plug away together!*** At the end of this letter, you'll see the different ways in which you can support my composing, help me make my music available to others, and, though mundane, pay the household bills.

We are designing this enterprise to be well-organized, with effective marketing, a website that professionally presents my sacred music, and an online library – in effect a real and **powerful platform to contribute to the body of sacred music**. As I mentioned earlier, our **first project is the production of three music videos and trailer**. Our artistic team, by faith, is already moving forward.

### **You can help us spread these works throughout the world!**

Even without such an organization in place, I've written dozens of works (you can hear some of them at **markemersondonnelly.com**). Right now, I have underway:

- Missa “*Alleluia. Magnus Dominus*” A polyphonic Mass based on the Alleluia from the 8th Sunday after Pentecost (14th Sunday in Ordinary Time) – begun July 2015; Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus completed
- “*Venite fillii, audite me*” (motet) – begun March 2017; about half done, but life (paying the bills) gets in the way; the same for the Missa “AMD” above
- *Preces in Elevatione* (Prayers at the Elevation) – in the sketches stage
- An oratorio: “*Creatio – On the Universe, Man & Woman, and The Word*” – – – begun; may take a year to finish! **THIS IS A BIG ONE!**

Recordings need to be made, as well, of the works I have already written. Significantly:

- **Missa “Sicut Cervus”** (2012) based on the double motet by Palestrina *Sicut cervus/Sitivit anima mea*
- many motets, another polyphonic Mass, a Requiem
- **Organum Novi Mundi** (e.g., *Media vita* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJueJeISYHU>; a future letter & video will be devoted to this unique style of composition which I have pioneered),
- hymns and other stuff.



As you can see, **I have produced a significant amount of music, and I know I have more to give.** But, RIGHT NOW, the challenge for us, **YOU & ME**, is to introduce this music to the world.

As I said earlier, the beginning of this process is to produce high-quality video recordings of some of my compositions. These will be used to spread awareness and interest in my work, and especially to present my music to professional ensembles (think of groups like the Tallis Scholars, Chanticleer, the London Oratory Schola Cantorum, etc.) for their consideration in their own future performances and recordings. Their performances will expose their audiences to my music, thus expanding our own base of supporters, and furthering the appreciation of my music as part of these great ensembles' repertoires.

### **Would you CONSIDER BECOMING A PATRON of this PROJECT?**

#### **Here is the plan of the first video project:**

- Video 1: [Pater Noster/Ave Maria](#) (*double-motet*) – my original polyphonic version based on the traditional Gregorian chants.
- Video 2: **Missa “Sicut cervus” Kyrie & Gloria** – my imitation mass based on Palestrina’s timeless double-motet *Sicut cervus/Sitivit anima mea*.
- Video 3: **Memento verbi tui** (*motet*) – my polyphonic setting of the Gregorian Communion verse, 20th Sunday after Pentecost (26th in O.T.)  
“[Mark's] *Memento* is truly a chef d'oeuvre!” - Rev. Garrick Huang, FSSP
- Video 4: **Trailer** – interviews explaining why I do what I do; much of what is contained in this letter; musical examples drawn from the first three videos.

We have a production budget. Here is an idea of the cost involved:

- \$1500: videographer and crew recording-day rate
- \$450: camera and lighting rental
- \$320: two 4 TB harddrives (one for recording/editing, one for back-up)
- \$450: recording engineer
- \$550: post-production audio editing
- \$4700: post-production editing and mixing.
- \$4,500: misc expenses for production personnel and singers

— To complete this initiative, we require about **\$12,500.** —



These videos are critical to launching my music into the public realm, which is why I am asking for your support today. ***We have begun receiving generous donations online and by cheque. Can I count your support?***

Please check out my current website [markemersondonnelly.com](http://markemersondonnelly.com) to learn a little bit more about me, and my compositions.

**This, dear friend, is where I again humbly and prayerfully ask you to consider a way to support this work.** Not only for our immediate video project, but also for a grand vision of ***continuing the tradition of writing sacred music and offering it to a world starving for Beauty.***

Moving forward, this is what I desire to accomplish by assembling a group of like-minded individuals to assist me in what **Henry, Benedict XVI, Dr. de Mattei** and, *I hope, YOU*, see as **VITAL** for our Church, our culture and ourselves.

**Chief among these individuals, at least from the standpoint of supporting my work, are generous patrons.**

**My call to compose full-time entails initial financing or “seed money.”**

This grand undertaking:

- to complete unfinished compositions and continue composing new works,
- to video record them in a professional setting with proper quality and technical support,
- to make my compositions available to scholas and choirs for use in the treasury of sacred music,
- to hire support staff for on-going marketing, booking, etc., and
- to nurture a future generation of sacred music composers and performers

— will take at least **\$250,000!** —

***A quarter of the million dollars! This is a number that I personally find unimaginable!*** BUT, it's not my job to ***imagine*** the substantial needs. If my discernment is correct, **my job is to compose the music.** I leave ***the success of this enterprise in the hands of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.*** He has blessed me abundantly with a loving wife, a beautiful (and musical) family, AND **the privilege of producing music ordered to His Greater Glory** (Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam).

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A.M.D.G.

If He wishes that this undertaking continues as I and many others envision it,  
***Our Lord will provide the resources and individuals necessary.***

- **To this end, I ask you to consider joining this GREAT ENTERPRISE by becoming a BENEFACTOR.**
- **If you know of someone else who could become a benefactor, would you please show them this letter?**
- **If you know of a FOUNDATION, GROUP, ORGANIZATION or FUND that supports this kind of work, would you consider INTRODUCING or connecting us to them?**

If you can help me in any of these ways, we can make amazing progress together in offering *music ordered to God's greater glory*. Please join me, a lowly servant who struggles daily to combine my professional work with the ordinary tasks of living.

Please go to the "***How to Contribute***" page which follows to see the ***various ways YOU can become a Patron!***

May God bless you for considering this humble, yet grand request. For further information, please go to my website at [markemersondonnelly.com](http://markemersondonnelly.com). Our **next NEWSLETTER – April 2020** will feature ***progress on our recording*** of what I hope you believe are beautiful and worthy works, as well as other tidbits of ***relevant musical insights*** I've picked up over the last forty years!

I sincerely wish you and your family every blessing. Please pray for this work.

God bless!

**Mark Emerson Donnelly**

*[ As any self-respecting composer,  
I've added my middle name. :) ]*

*Mark with  
Bishop Athanasius Schneider*



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A.M.D.G.

## ***How to Contribute***

**\*\*\* Please include this page with all donations made by cheque \*\*\***

- **Regular monthly contribution** [ ] \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- **One-time gift** [ ] \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Methods:

- through our *WonderWe* campaign [wonderwe.com/mdonnellymusic](http://wonderwe.com/mdonnellymusic)
- [Interac.ca](http://Interac.ca) *e-Transfer* to **composer@markemersondonnelly.com**, or
- by *cheque* to “**Mark Emerson Donnelly**” **Memo: composer**  
and mail to Mark Emerson Donnelly  
15561 Buena Vista Ave.  
White Rock, BC CANADA V4B 1Y9

For **Canadian Patrons** who would like a **Revenue Canada Tax receipt**:

- [Interac.ca](http://Interac.ca) *e-Transfer* to **composer@unavocecanada.org**,

**NOTE:** Please include your email and mailing address to receive a tax receipt

- or by *cheque* to “**Una Voce Canada**” **Memo: composer**  
and mail to Una Voce Canada  
P.O. Box 30027  
North Vancouver, BC V7H 2Y8

- **Sponsorship Opportunities (see contact info below):**

- individual compositions
- recording projects
- workshops led by me for choirs and scholas
- talks by me on church music & composition in the 21st century

***Please contact me if you have questions OR can assist us in ANY other way.***

604-339-4435 (text or voice)

[info@markemersondonnelly.com](mailto:info@markemersondonnelly.com)

***And make sure we have your correct address for my next  
NEWSLETTER: April 2020!***

*Per J.M.J.  
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