ANIMA MUNDI PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS
The
Heart of Humanity
Concert Series

A TIME FOR LIFE
Robert Kyr: A Time for Life
An environmental oratorio

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A TIME FOR LIFE BY ROBERT KYR
Program note by the composer

One of the most urgent issues facing the world today is the ecological crisis caused by humanity’s inability to live in harmony with the natural world. My collaboration with Cappella Romana grew out of our mutual concern about this potentially catastrophic situation. After many discussions, I decided to create an environmental oratorio in order to address this crucial topic from a variety of perspectives.

*A Time for Life* (2007) was created for eight of the principal singers of Cappella Romana, Alexander Lingas (its director), and the ensemble Medieval Strings with a later version (2008) for modern instruments (Third Angle New Music). The work features each of its vocalists as a soloist, a chamber musician (a member of duo- and trio-formations), and a chorister (part of the full eight-voice choral texture). I know the artists of Cappella Romana well and so I created the oratorio expressly for them so that they could explore the full range of their abilities. In this sense, *A Time for Life* is a musical play in which each “character” (singer or instrumentalist) performs a variety of roles. In a live performance, this play is also enacted through both the music and a simple choral choreography; the movement of the performers through the concert space is a journey that embodies the meaning of the text.

The composite text for *A Time for Life* was adapted from a wide range of sources that explore the relationship of humanity to nature. The work is structured in three large-scale parts, as follows:

- **Part I: Creation.** In the first part, the nature of creation is celebrated through praise for the Creator and through rejoicing in the pure creative force of existence. The text was adapted from several sources: a Sioux Prayer; an Eskimo Song; Psalm 8; *An Akathist in Praise of God’s Creation* (attributed to Metropolitan Tryphon, 1934, but possibly written by Father Gregory Petrov who died in a Soviet prison camp in 1942); and the Orthodox “Service for the Environment” that was written in 1961 by the monk Gerasimos at the monastery of the Skete of Little Anne on Mt. Athos (Greece).

- **Part II: Forgetting.** The second part explores humanity’s present inability to live in harmony with nature as “forgetting” and makes a recurrent appeal to the Creator: “… We forget who we are. Help us to remember …” Forgetting is structured in six sections and each consists of two parts: a “supplication” (a solo followed by canons) paired with a “witness” account (an aria, duo or trio). The sources for Part II are: the U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program; the Books of Jeremiah and Isaiah; the Chinook Psalter; and an Ojibway Prayer, as well as the Orthodox “Service for the Environment.”

- **Part III: Remembering.** The third part begins with the *Dance of Life* followed by the *Canticle of Life*. The “dance” features a double chorus singing call-and-response (three women juxtaposed with three men), whereas the “canticle” is structured in four parts, each of which contains a soliloquy (solo), a section of canons, and a chorale (full, eight-voice choral texture). The text sources for Part III are a Pawnee/Osage/Omaha Indian Song, a Navaho Chant, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Orthodox “Service for the Environment.”

*A Time for Life* is a “musical play” that traces a journey from the glory of Creation as it was given to humanity (Part I) through our destructive behavior as demonstrated by the current global environmental crisis (Part II: Forgetting). The potential for destruction is total: the forest (Supplication & Witness II); the oceans (Supplication III); animal life (Supplication IV); the air we breathe (Supplication V); and the entire planet itself as plagued by corruption and abuse (Supplication VI). No one can escape the responsibility for the earth (“My people are fools,/Senseless children/Who have no understanding”), especially the leaders (“No more will the fool be called noble,/For he speaks foolishly,/Planning evil in his heart”). The ruling class of all nations is particularly culpable in its folly (“Howl, you shepherds, and wail!/Roll in the dust, leaders of the flock!/There is no flight for shepherds,/No escape for leaders of the flock./There is no escape!”).

The final phase of the journey (Part III: Remembering) moves towards a hopeful future in
which humanity serves as a responsible steward of the earth and thus realigns itself with the creative forces of existence. This journey is a spiritual one in which we remember our true responsibility of stewardship for the earth, and through this awakening finally “act[s] as one to preserve creation” (Part III: Final Chorale). This spiritual awakening leads to true and sustained action, as the final arc of the journey passes through three phases: “…remembering…restoring…rejoicing…” In turn, these phases lead to gratitude for all life: “Beauty before me…behind me…below me…above me…around me…In beauty it is finished…”

A Time for Life is dedicated to Alexander Lingas and Cappella Romana. I believe that music and the arts have a crucial role to play in the transformation of the current energy of cynicism and destruction into the life-sustaining attitude and energy of creativity.

And thus, my environmental oratorio traces our journey from a state of division and separation to the way of unity and wholeness.

—Robert Kyr
“THE GREEN PATRIARCH,” CAPPELLA ROMANA, AND A TIME FOR LIFE

Before climate change became a pressing item on the global agenda, signs of human abuse of the natural environment had prompted efforts in religious communities throughout the world to recover spiritually grounded notions of human stewardship within creation. For Orthodox Christianity, this process began in earnest during the second half of the tenure of His All-Holiness Dimitrios I as Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (1972–1991). Theological inquiry was succeeded by public engagement in 1989 when Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios set aside September 1st, New Year’s Day in the liturgical calendar of Eastern Orthodox Churches, as an occasion for Christians under his jurisdiction to offer prayers annually for the protection of the environment.

September 1st was chosen as liturgically suitable because themes of supplication and thanksgiving for creation were already present in the existing medieval service texts for this day (albeit with emphasis on preserving the city, imperial government and church of Byzantine Constantinople). Common prayer specifically “for our environment and for the welfare of all creation” was facilitated the following year by the commissioning of a new liturgical office in Greek from Fr. Gerasimos of the Skete of Little Anne on the Holy Mountain of Athos (1905–91), a prolific poet who had been previously recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as “Hymnwriter of the Great Church.” In 1992, at the request of the World Council of Churches, Archimandrite Ephrem (Lash) made a slightly expanded English version of this new office, the full text of which is available on his personal website (www.anastasis.org.uk/environm.htm).

The present Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, has made the preservation of the environment a focal point of his ministry. Described previously in this booklet by the Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, his efforts have led the international media to dub him “the Green Patriarch.” One of their recurrent themes, sounded also by other Eastern Orthodox writers, has been that maltreatment of the natural environment rests ultimately on human distortions of relationships with God and nature that are most properly ordered by love and thanksgiving.

Some years ago Robert Kyr, having become aware of and admiring the environmental initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, approached me with the idea of composing an oratorio for Cappella Romana that would address some of the same issues. This led to further conversations between us exploring past and present perspectives on the relationship between divinity, humanity and the environment. These discussions served as a background for the creation of his libretto for A Time for Life, in which Professor Kyr sensitively incorporates excerpts from the Bible, the worship of Eastern Orthodoxy, and the prayers of indigenous peoples. As set to music, these texts movingly render the loss of ancient wisdom regarding responsible stewardship of creation, its horrific consequences for our environment, and the potential offered by the recovery of spiritual tradition for re-establishing a harmonious relationship with nature.

—Alexander Lingas
A TIME FOR LIFE
An Environmental Oratorio

Vocalists: S1 (Soprano I)
           S2 (Soprano II/Mezzo-soprano)
           A1 (Alto I)
           A2 (Alto II)
           T1 (Tenor I)
           T2 (Tenor II)
           B1 (Bass I / Baritone)
           B2 (Bass II)

Textual Sources: The composite text for A Time for Life is adapted from the following sources:
                a Sioux prayer; an Eskimo song; the Chinook Psalter; an Ojibway prayer; a Pawnee/ Osage/ Omaha Indian song; a Navaho chant; the Orthodox “Service for the Environment”; “An Akathist in Praise of God’s Creation” (Orthodox); United Nations Environmental Sabbath Program; Psalm 8; Book of Jeremiah; Book of Isaiah; Book of Ecclesiastes; and original texts by the composer.

Part I: CREATION

i. Prologue. [Instrumental]

ii. Proclaiming.
T2: O Lord,
You are the light of those in darkness,
And my spirit sings your praises:
Glory for calling us into being.
   [Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]

iii. Arriving.
T2: O Lord,
How wonderful is your name
In all the earth!
   [Adapted, Psalm 8:1]
Glory for creating the beauty of the universe;
Glory for your eternity within this fleeting world;
Glory for each step in our life journey…
   [Adapted, An Akathist in Praise of God’s Creation]

iv. Praising.
S2: O our Father, the Sky, hear us
And make us strong.

   T2: Glory
   For the natural world through which
   We live and move and have our being.
   T1: O our Mother, the Earth, hear us
   And give us support.

   T2: Glory
   For the flowering earth
   Filled with plants and trees.
   A1: O Spirit of the East,
   Send us your Wisdom.

   T2: Glory
   For the seas, vast and wide,
   And all the creatures within.
   B1: O Spirit of the South,
   May we tread your path of life.

   T2: Glory
   For all animals and living things,
   Both great and small.

   A2: O Spirit of the West,
   May we always be ready for the long journey.

   T2: Glory
   For beautiful weather and flourishing seasons.

   B2: O Spirit of the North, purify us
   With your cleansing winds.

   T2: Glory
   For the breath of winds
   And the flow of waters.
   T2: [Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]
   The others: [Adapted, Sioux Prayer]

v. Trembling.
S1: The great sea has set me in motion,
Set me adrift,
And I move as a weed in the river.
O the arch of sky
And mightiness of storms
Encompasses me,
And I am left
Trembling with joy.
   [Adapted, Eskimo Song]

T2: O Lord,
Glory to You
For the joy of moving and seeing and living.
   [Adapted, An Akathist in Praise of God’s Creation]

vi. Rejoicing.
[All:] Glory
From age to age.
   [Adapted, An Akathist in Praise of God’s Creation]
Part II: FORGETTING

i. Prologue. [Instrumental]

ii. Supplication I: We Ignore Your Word
S1: O God:
We ignore your Word
Serving only ourselves.
[Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]
T2: We forget who we are.
S1+T2: Help us to remember.
[Adapted, U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program]

iii. Witness I: Look and Behold
S2: My people are fools,
Senseless children
Who have no understanding;
They are wise in evil,
And do not know
How to do good.
I look at the earth,
It is waste and void;
Look and behold: many are dying,
Even the birds fly away!
Look and behold:
Our gardens are deserts.
[Adapted, Jeremiah 4: 22-26]

iv. Supplication II: We Devour Your Forest
T2: O Creator:
We devour your forest,
Turning land into pavement.
S1: We forget who we are.
[All:] Help us to remember.

v. Witness II: Breathe and Remember
T1: Our garden was so diverse:
Plants from so many families,
So many colors, fragrances.
Basil, mint, lavender,
God help me to remember;
Raspberry, Apple, Rose,
God fill my heart with love;
Dill, anise, tansy,
Holy winds blow through me;
Rhododendron, zinnia,
May my prayer be beautiful.
O God, may my remembrance
Be as incense to thee,
As I breathe and remember
The ancient forests of earth.
[Adapted, Chinook Psalter]

vi. Supplication III: We Defile Your Oceans
S1: O Creator:
We defile your oceans,
Harming and killing sea life.
S1+T2: We forget who we are.
[All:] Help us to remember.

vii. Witness III: The Survivor
S2/A1: Woe to those who call evil good,
And good evil;
Who change darkness into light,
And light into darkness;
Who change bitter into sweet,
And sweet into bitter!
Woe to those who are wise in their own sight,
Who deprive the just man of his rights.
[Adapted, Isaiah 5:20-25]
No more will the fool be called noble,
For he speaks foolishly,
Planning evil in his heart.
But the noble man plans noble deeds
And by noble deeds, he survives.
[Adapted, Isaiah 32: 5-8]

viii. Supplication IV: We Destroy Nature
T2: O Creator:
We destroy nature,
Extinguishing animal life.
S1: We forget who we are.
[All:] Help us to remember.

ix. Witness IV: Howl, You Shepherds!
T1/B1: Howl, you shepherds, and wail!
Roll in the dust, leaders of the flock!
There is no flight for shepherds,
No escape for leaders of the flock.
There is no escape!
[Adapted, Jeremiah 25: 34-38]
“Woe to those who mislead
And scatter the flock of my pasture;
You have not cared for them,
And you will suffer for your evil deeds,
For your evil heart.”
[Adapted, Jeremiah 23: 1-4]
Howl, you shepherds, and wail!
Roll in the dust, leaders of the flock!
There is no flight for shepherds,
No escape for leaders of the flock.
[Adapted, Jeremiah 25: 34-38]

x. Supplication V: We Pollute the Air
A1: O Creator:
We pollute your air,
Spreading death and disease.
S1+T2: We forget who we are.
[All:] Help us to remember.

xi. Witness V: The Joyless Land
S1/A1/A2: The earth is laid waste;
Stripped and barren.
The world is polluted
Because of its inhabitants,
Who have broken too many laws.
They who dwell on earth turn pale,
And only a few good people are left.
Silent, the cheerful timbrels;
Ended, the cry of jubilation;
Still is the dancing harp.
Broken down is the city of chaos:
Every joy has left the land.
[Adapted, Isaiah 24: 3-20]

xii. Supplication VI: The Dying Planet
T2: O Creator:
Your planet is dying
From our corruption and abuse.
A1+B1: We forget who we are.
[All:] Help us to remember.

xiii. Witness VI: The Sacred Way
T1/B1/B2: O Creator:
Look at our brokenness.

In all creation,
Only the human family
Has strayed from the Sacred Way.

We are divided
And must come back together again
To walk as one in wholeness.

O Creator,
O Sacred One:

Teach us love, compassion, and honor,
So we may heal the earth.
So we may heal each other.
[Adapted, Ojibway Prayer]

Part III: REMEMBERING

I. Dance of Life
A1: A time for all seasons
Under heaven:
[All:] A time to live
And a time to die;
A time to plant
And a time to harvest;
A time to rend
And a time to sew;
A time to hurt
And a time to heal;
A time to seek
And a time to lose;
A time to embrace
And a time to reject;
A time to remember
And a time to forget;
A time to cry
And a time to laugh;
A time to love
And a time to hate.

A time to give
And a time to take;
A time to destroy
And a time to create;
A time for action
And a time for thought;
A time for war
And a time for peace;
A time to mourn
And a time to dance;
A time for silence
And a time for music—
A time for life
And only life.
[Adapted, Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8]
II. Canticle of Life

Canticle: First Part

i. First Soliloquy
T2: O Lord:
Help me to remember who I am,
Guide me to preserve your creation.
Lead me to greater life.
[Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]

ii. First Canons
[All:] Help me to remember who I am…

iii. Chorale, First Verse
[All:] Remember, remember
The circle of the sky:
The stars and the brown eagle,
The supernatural winds
Breathing night and day
From the four directions.
[Adapted, Pawnee/Osage/Omaha Indian Song]

Canticle: Second Part

iv. Second Soliloquy
S1: O Creator:
Guide us to preserve your creation.
Help us to protect the fullness of nature
In which we live and move and have our being.
Give us the breath of winds.
Give us the flow of waters.
Give us light.
[Adapted, Pawnee/Osage/Omaha Indian Song]

v. Chorale, Second Verse
[All:] Remember, remember
The great life of the sun:
Breathing on the earth,
Falling upon earth,
Bringing out life from the earth—
Life covering the earth.
[Adapted, Pawnee/Osage/Omaha Indian Song]

vi. Second Canons
House made of dawn.
House made of evening light.
House made of the dark cloud.
House made of male rain.
House made of dark mist.
House made of female rain.
House made of pollen.
[Adapted, Navaho Chant]

Canticle: Third Part

vii. Third Soliloquy
A1: O Master:
Help us to remember
The holiness of your creation.
Guide us to preserve
The majesty of nature.
[Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]

viii. Chorale, Third Verse
[All:] Remember, remember
The holiness of life:
The running streams and dwellings,
The young within the nest,
A hearth for sacred fire,
The holy flame.
[Adapted, Pawnee/Osage/Omaha Indian Song]

ix. Third Canons
Restore my feet for me. Restore my legs for me.
Restore my body for me. Restore my mind for me.
Restore my voice for me.
[Adapted, Navaho Chant]

Canticle: Final Part

x. Final Chorale
[All:] O Holy One:
Give peace to all nations
And understanding in all things,
So we may act as one
To preserve your creation.
[Adapted, Orthodox “Service for the Environment”]

xi. Final Canons
S1, T2: Rejoicing may I walk.
Rejoicing, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
Rejoicing, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Rejoicing, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Rejoicing, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
xii. Epilogue
S1, T2: May it be beautiful before me.
May it be beautiful behind me.
May it be beautiful below me.
May it be beautiful above me.
May it be beautiful all around me.
In beauty it is finished.

*Beauty before me…
Beauty behind me…
Beauty below me…
Beauty above me…
Beauty around me…
T2: Remember…*
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ROBERT KYR

Robert Kyr (b. 1952) is considered to be one of the most prolific composers of his generation; he is also a writer and filmmaker. His output features a wide range of music for vocal ensembles of all types, as well as twelve symphonies, three chamber symphonies, three violin concerti, and works for diverse chamber ensembles. Luminous and sometimes ecstatic in effect, Kyr’s music is basically tonal and modal, and he often combines music with other media in order to explore important intercultural themes, such as peace-making (conflict and reconciliation) and the environment (living in harmony with nature). His Songs of the Soul was premiered by Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare’s Company of Voices, and hailed in the Wall Street Journal as “a powerful new achievement in American music that vividly traces a journey from despair to transcendence.”

Five compact discs of Kyr’s music are currently available: Songs of the Soul (Conspirare); A Time for Life (Cappella Romana); Violin Concerto Trilogy (Third Angel New Music); Unseen Rain (Ensemble Project Ars Nova), and The Passion according to Four Evangelists (Back Bay Chorale). In addition, his music is featured on two Conspirare discs on Harmonia Mundi: Freedom Song and Sing Freedom! (his original spiritual, Freedom Song), as well as several other compilation discs, including Faces of a Woman (MDG 344-1468), Celestial Light: Music by Hildegard von Bingen and Robert Kyr (Telarc CD 80456), and The Fourth River: The Millennium Revealed (Telarc CD 80534).

Kyr holds degrees from Harvard (Ph.D.), University of Pennsylvania (M.A.), and Yale (B.A.). He has held teaching positions in composition and music theory at Yale, UCLA, Hartt School of Music, Aspen Music School, and the Longy School of Music. Currently, he is Philip H. Knight Professor of Music and Chair of the Composition Department at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. In addition to teaching, Kyr directs the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium, the Music Today Festival, and the Vanguard Concert Series. Robert Kyr’s website is www.robertkyr.com and he can be contacted at kyrcomposer@yahoo.com.

cappellaromana.org

ALEXANDER LINGAS

Alexander Lingas, Music Director and Founder of Cappella Romana, is a Professor of Music at City, University of London, and a Fellow of the University of Oxford’s European Humanities
Research Centre. He completed his doctorate on Sunday matins in the rite of Hagia Sophia at the University of British Columbia and then, with the support of a SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship, moved to Oxfordshire to study theology with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware. His present work embraces not only historical study but also ethnography and performance. His awards include Fulbright and Onassis grants for musical studies in Greece with cantor Lycourgos Angelopoulos, the British Academy’s Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowship, research leave supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and the St. Romanos the Melodist medallion of the National Forum for Greek Orthodox Church Musicians (USA). In 2018 His All-Holiness, Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, bestowed on him the title of Archon Mousikodidaskalos.

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Third Angle New Music String Quartet has received rave reviews for its performances of contemporary music. Following its recent tour of China, the quartet performed the epic four-hour String Quartet No. 2 by Morton Feldman and received the following accolade from Asymmetry Music Magazine in February 2012, "I cannot imagine it [Feldman String Quartet No. 2] played any more beautifully or perfectly than Third Angle played it. Rich tone, perfect intonation, razor-sharp ensemble, and a palpable love for this lovely music. No praise can be too high for this performance.” Learn more at thirdangle.org.

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