

mm — Culture Without Captions April 26, 2017

Our concert series had a Mass scheduled. We paid, so we go. I'm going for the cultural experience this time. I'm sort of biased against Masses. I wonder why.

Catholics thrive on them. I've known people who went to Mass every day.

I heard some men in animated discussion about how different Priests did the Mass.

It's a daily practice in Catholic Churches. Not weekly or monthly. Every day.

I never belonged to a liturgical church that used creeds. Maybe that's my problem.

We were leaving a small reception held before our concert. David Maslanka was sitting alone in the hotel lobby. I never expected to meet a composer at a concert. Or that I would dare ask him a question about the central theology of his Mass. We sat and talked for several minutes.

He endures fools graciously and answered me, a stranger, with a most personal testimony of his feelings. In a few short words he was beyond the questions of literalistic thought. Living with this Mass was personally transforming, he said. The heart of the Mass for him is transformation. *"I must acknowledge the action of God in all the years of my life, especially in the years of turmoil and uncertainty."* I wasn't expecting that.

I felt like I had just asked God what God had in mind at the time of the Big Bang! I was beyond my level. We all left to find our way to the auditorium.

Just before the program was to begin the Composer came in with Steven Zielke, the Oregon State University Professor of Music. They sat in the row right in front of us!

We were going to experience this two hour Mass behind the creators of this event. I would have to adjust my feelings about the mass. It will be a challenge.

For one thing I really don't hear well. I need closed caption. Here are 120 of the finest voices in our town singing words I can't hear. Two choirs, separated by a great wind ensemble before me. I feel and hear the music. I try to open myself to what I can see and feel.

I could see the side of the Composer's face clearly two seats over, not three feet away. He wrote every note that the 120 voices were singing. He wrote every note for each of the 23 instruments played by the 35 musicians. He's reworked the whole Mass several times. I imagine that every note and word is so embedded in his mind that he "hears" everything. I couldn't hear what he heard but I could watch —

...the movement of his head as he anticipated the entrance of an instrument or section,

...the nodding of his head as he kept time during intricate parts of the Mass,

...the tilt of his head as he mentally directed the choirs,

...the bowing of his head and closing of his eyes as he seemed to struggle for composure,

...the several times when he removed his glasses to wipe his eyes.

Yes, I got it. The Mass was more than voices and instruments, more than words or theology. I realized that my bias about the Mass was narrow-minded. I accuse myself of the same failing I see in Christians whose literal-mindedness shuts out greater meaning.

There was a standing ovation of course as the Music Professor led the Composer forward. He spent some moments appreciating all the musicians, then the audience...a humble and gracious man. I'm sure his were not the only eyes that were moist

I also realized that I don't need to be able to hear. Sometimes the best way to hear music is through the composer's heart.

Art Morgan, April 26, 2017

MASS by David Maslanka, Presented by Corvallis Repertory Singers and Oregon State University Music with the OSU Wind Ensemble, OSU Chamber Choir, OSU Bella Voce, Chris Chapman Conductor, Steven Zielke, Artistic Director and Director of Corvallis Repertory Singers and the OSU Chamber Director.