

Reviews and Testimonies

From various sources, which are acknowledged in the text...

1. Reviews

The "*Jerusalem Passion*" ... judging by the overwhelming response to this performance, could easily become as regular and popular as its distinguished predecessor, "*St. Matthew Passion*" ... herein lies perhaps its greatest strength and significance: the coming together of people working toward a common goal, fired with the same enthusiasm ... The piece remains a considerable achievement of communication and seems able to inspire genuine joy - no mean feat in today's world ... The best number in the score, which could easily be a hit if it were a musical, was the infectiously rhythmic and catchy "*Where are the Eagles?*". It showed what composer Murray Wylie is capable of ...

Tim Bridgewater, "The Dominion", Wellington, New Zealand (1995).

Passion Play has hope on its side

At 35, *Murray Wylie* has become something of a musical "Pied Piper". Since its humble premiere at **Kelvin Grove High School** Brisbane, in April 1987, his oratorio "*The Jerusalem Passion*" has been applauded by audiences of more than 15,000 in Australia's capital cities. And it has involved more than 1000 performers at major concert halls.

The work has an excitement and optimism which has universal appeal; the music is accessible and the words speak of hope in a world where, for many, hope is not easily perceived. "*The Jerusalem Passion*" goes beyond the accepted expression of Christian faith embodying the Crucifixion. It speaks of a "*New Jerusalem*" - a spiritual city of unity between God's people.

The son of a Presbyterian minister, *Wylie* graduated from the **Queensland Conservatorium of Music** with a degree in Music Education. With the help of his wife *Kate* he produced this oratorio in three weeks in early 1987. With negotiations started for performances in **Singapore** and the **United States**, busy times are ahead....

Reviewer 'BH', "Sunday Mail", Brisbane, Queensland (1991).

'Powerful' Music

Much of Bach's rich heritage of sacred music was written for the demands of the 18th century society in which he lived and worked. The audience for his church cantatas was the Lutheran congregation which assembled for conventional religious observance.

Two centuries later, Brisbane composer Murray Wylie has written an oratorio for the times in which he lives. *The Jerusalem Passion*, performed by the Vision One Choir and Orchestra in the Performing Arts Complex Concert Hall on Friday, speaks first of the Crucifixion then of the hope that God's people will be united spiritually in a "*New Jerusalem*".

When hope and unity seem out of reach to many people, Wylie's powerful and uplifting music is being embraced by thousands of people. The text has been skilfully balanced between the Old and New Testaments; the music is wonderfully accessible with its appealing melodies and rhythms.

Wylie has brilliantly contrasted the lyrical passages with proclamations of driving force. The discipline and commitment of Vision One's Choir and Orchestra under Wylie's meticulous direction earns the highest praise, to be equally shared by the fine group of soloists. Especially rewarding was the playing of young Sydney organist Robert Wagner, and the articulate and expressive readings by narrator Helen Foster.

Barbara Hebden, "The Courier-Mail", Brisbane, Queensland (1989).

National tour for Jerusalem Passion

Murray Wylie may never attain the preeminence of a Bach or Handel, yet his *Jerusalem Passion* should earn him a memorable niche in the record of religious composition.

Described as a contemporary oratorio, the work premiered in Brisbane during Easter 1987, was repeated in October and was given two more performances by the Vision One Choir and Orchestra at Brisbane Concert Hall after Easter 1988.

It is now to be presented nationally, beginning in the Perth Concert hall and ending at the Sydney Opera House in 1989.

Its inspiration grew from the composer's religious response to the continuing event that has been making its mark, for better or for worse, for almost 2000 years.

Jerusalem Passion is one of the better marks of the progress of Christianity through the centuries. It is probably also one of the few serious modern attempts to strike a positive mode in drawing out the key concepts of the Christian message in a contemporary musical idiom.

In doing so, Wylie has produced an eminently accessible work linking many forms from the 20th-century musical palette. It is full of contemporary melodic and rhythmic devices - jazz,

rock, classical, middle of the road, even a chorus reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Through it runs a chant-like call that seems to cry right from the Judaic tradition.

Presented as a concert oratorio, the style is such that it can be embraced by performers of all ages, and it is. Grey-haired choristers stood side by side with school singers, yet without the incongruous effect that sometimes borders on the ludicrous when grey heads try to be relevant in a pop hymn style in a liturgical context.

Wylie has maintained a musical and religious integrity in his *Jerusalem Passion*. Its sincerity cannot be denied. Nor does it have to stoop to the trite or inconsequential. Eclectic it may be, innovative it may not be, yet its strength remains its relevance, sincerity and spiritual impact.

Most of the text is biblical and is skilfully selected and unified as is Wylie's blending and contracting of moods. He never allows the drama to sag or interest to drop. It is given breathing space and a satisfying meditative dimension by interludes on piano or organ. Notable in this regard is the organ postlude developing from the solo *In Your Name*.

Narration provides a further contrast and links the seemingly endless array of musical motifs which Wylie has explored. Voices blended well without ever a sign, thanks be, of a need for raucous bawling to achieve a constant vivacity. Soloists, choir, and musicians were all well prepared in their work, although the choir entered rocky waters in the contrapuntal *Amen* that ended *Into Your Hands*.

The excitement and expectation generated by the sequential development in *Forsaken and Finished* and *Out of His Side*, well drawn out by Wylie's sure baton, and the ostinato patterns in *Searching for the Body* underlined the dramatic urgency that made the work succeed so well.

In addition to performances by Vision One teams in Perth, Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne, the *Jerusalem Passion* is being prepared for television presentation. And it will be exported to the United States and Switzerland if current negotiations come to fruition.

Patricia Kelly, "Opera Australia", (May 1988).

The Jerusalem Passion

During 1988-89 a significant musical happening will take place in most of the capital cities of Australia. It is significant because it is music which meets high artistic standards and yet is distinctly Christian - an example of the excellence all Christian artists should seek in order to honour their Creator.

The work is the "*Jerusalem Passion*" by Australian composer, Murray Wylie. The Passion is described as a 'contemporary oratorio. One critic compared it with Handel's 'Messiah', and compared it favourably. In fact, the ABC has been so impressed it will be televising a performance of the Oratorio in the Sydney Opera House in 1989.

As music, it has a wide range of styles, from the contemporary classical through to jazz, soft rock, even melodious 'chorus' style. There's something there for everyone. Most of the music is readily 'accessible' as the critics are saying. You enjoy it immediately and it stays with you.

Lyricaly it is excellent too. Murray Wylie says '*From the age of fifteen, I felt a great desire to*

serve the Lord in music, and had a vision to see its life-changing power used for His purpose. The burden which was always nearest my heart was to declare in music the hope and vision of the church in these last days.

'Christ and His Body are to be one in heart and mind and endeavour in these last days. It is the function of those who are musicians and singers to carry this message of unity and to gather up God's people in worship so that His power may be revealed in the earth'

Wylie has taken the city of Jerusalem and used it as a symbol of the work of Christ. The old Jerusalem portrays Jesus' Passion to redeem man, while the new Jerusalem shows His passion for His people to be one with Him as His eternal Bride.

The oratorio is being performed by the *Vision One* choir and orchestra. This includes many people drawn together from each capital city specifically for the performance.

Christian music lovers really should not miss the "*The Jerusalem Passion*". It is being applauded generously as an inspired and moving experience.

Geoff Strelan, "New Day International", (August 1988).

A message of hope with real melody, rhythm

In the Concert Hall of the Queensland Performing Arts Complex on the three nights of Friday March 31, and Saturday and Sunday April 1 and 2 (the week after Easter), the *Vision One* choir and orchestra, under the baton of Murray Wylie, will present *The Jerusalem Passion*, an oratorio composed by the conductor.

This work, which first saw the light of day in fairly humble surroundings in a Brisbane high school hall early in 1987, is making its third visit to the Concert Hall. It had its official premiere there in October 1987, returned for a two-night performance at Easter 1988, and will now play for three nights just after Easter this year. In the mean time it has been presented in Perth Melbourne, and Adelaide and will make its Sydney debut at the Opera House in May. I understand, too that *The Jerusalem Passion* is soon to go international.

On April 9, 1988, the performance at the Concert Hall in Brisbane was recorded "live" and is available on video cassette. I have seen this video recording and can add my vote of approval to the many favourable and enthusiastic reviews it has received around the nation.

The Jerusalem Passion is a contemporary, modern-classical oratorio, that is a sacred composition whose story is told through music and voice. It does not rely on sets or costumes but the visual effect of massed choir and orchestra is very pleasing.

The performance, which runs for ninety minutes, is in two parts. The first part begins in Galilee, portrayed in idyllic terms in one of the early songs *Galilee*. This is followed by the moving *Shepherd's Song*, based on chapter 10 of St. John's Gospel and the Good Shepherd imagery. Through choral harmonies, lyric solos and meditative narration, the earthly journey of Jesus is traced from Galilee to Jerusalem. We follow Him on His entry into the Holy City and to His Last Supper with His disciples. The solo *In Your Name* is based on Jesus' prayer to His Father in John 17, and develops into a very pleasing organ postlude. This is one of the number of interludes by piano and organ throughout the performance which provide a certain breathing

space and afford scope for reflection and meditation.

From the Supper Room the action passes to Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane, His trial and Crucifixion. The first part of the work thus reaches its climax in the earthly Jerusalem and concludes with a series of choral and solo numbers, *Forsaken and Finished, Into Your Hands*, and *Out of His Side*. which generate a real sense of expectation and excitement.

The second part of the performance is set against the background of *The New Jerusalem*, not a geographical location but the biblical symbol for the completion of God's saving plan with the final coming of the Kingdom. The image of the Jerusalem, taken from the Book of Revelation 3:12, marks the the end of the age inaugurated by the death and Resurrection of Jesus. This spiritual city is also a symbol of the hope and the potential for unity which flow from the ministry, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

In this second part, the solo *Searching for the Body Of Christ* underlines the dramatic urgency which is conveyed by the work as a whole. A variety of passages from New Testament writings are woven into the songs, and the intervening narrations which are brief and do not jar the overall development.

The performance rises to a prayer of hope for Christ's return, expressed in the solo *Jerusalem Come Down*. It concludes with *Communion Chorus* which conveys the biblical image of the messianic banquet, a prophetic symbol of the unity to be experienced in the Kingdom of God. I was reminded of the magnificent conclusion to that great film *Places in the Heart*.

Composer Murray Wylie comes out of a strong Christian background being the son of a former Queensland Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia... (*missing line of text*) ... most Presbyterians joined the new Uniting Church. Wylie is a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. After completing his studies, he spent a couple of years as a high school music teacher, before becoming involved with the Brisbane Christian fellowship, a non-denominational Christian group. He says it was always his feeling that he should serve God through his music. After composing the oratorio he and others formed the *Vision One* organisation to handle the huge administrative tasks connected with staging performances throughout Australia. The name *Vision One* was chosen to reflect the hope of a unified Body of Christ becoming a reality before the advent of the New Jerusalem.

The work is scored for choir, soloists, narrator, orchestra, rhythm section and pipe organ. A feature is the way it successfully combines classical, middle of the road, jazz and rock formations of music, without sacrificing musical or religious integrity. School children perform alongside more mature singers and the end result of this blending of musical forms and performers is a concert that will be appreciated by people of all ages. In each State the oratorio is presented almost entirely by local singers and musicians. More than 1000 performers have already been involved in *The Jerusalem Passion*.

Amidst the general critical acclaim there have been minor negative reactions. It has been said that the work lacks the emotional depth or musical complexity to rival Bach's *Passion* music or the works of Handel. I am sure Wylie would readily admit to such shortcomings at this stage of his career - he is (*was!* - *ed.*) only 35 - although he nominates a work like the *St. Matthew's Passion* as one of his inspirations. To be nit-picking one could also complain that the music at times reflects a certain... (*missing line of text*) ... admirable blending and contrasting of moods, along with a pleasing variety of many musical motifs. It never becomes trite or banal, and one's interest is never allowed to wane.

The theological purists might complain that there is an undue emphasis on the return of Christ,

but this adventist approach is natural in a work which comes out of a strong evangelical background. It does seem at times that the Church is presented as an exclusively other-worldly reality. But the role of the Church between the events in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago and the coming end-time is not neglected. Full justice is done to such images of Church as *Body of Christ* and *New Temple*, while the role of the *Eucharist* in this Christian era is given its due place.

Wylie has succeeded in his aim to present the timeless message of Christianity in a contemporary musical idiom and to offer a message of hope and optimism. What he has done is to produce a religious and musical *Tale of Two Cities*. The performance reflects sincerity, a depth of faith and boundless enthusiasm and the music has a message of hope with real melody and rhythm. A combination that has always had the power to draw people. Look at *The Sound of Music*.

I recommend this performance to all who will be trying to retain something of the joy and hope of the Easter message as experienced in the liturgies and celebrations of Holy Week and of the Resurrection event. I believe it would also provide an ideal environment for groups that have been involved in the process of initiation into the Church community at easter-time. Don't delay! I suspect that these three evenings will be sold out performances which happened on the two previous occasions when *The Jerusalem Passion* was performed... *(missing line of text)*

(Fr) Bill O'Shea, "The Catholic Leader", (March 1989).

Passion with a touch of Diamond

In the beginning was Handel's *Messiah* but now there is a latter-day oratorio in its third year of presentation which is steadily gaining ground to rival the popularity of the original masterpiece,

Murray Wylie's "*Jerusalem Passion*", stylistically owing more to Andrew Lloyd Webber or possibly Neil Diamond than Bach, Handel or Mendelssohn, has tapped into a vein of popular consciousness with music which is above all tuneful, colourful and accessible.

It is tempting to compare this work with *Messiah* because they both tell of Christ's Passion, but from quite different perspectives.

Wylie's medium brought the timeless Christian message of hope, redemption and unity in its recent three-night season in the Concert Hall,

The choirs, mostly in a supporting role, were well-trained and enthusiastic. The soloists, though not professionally trained voices, were effective in this particular presentation, coming over with obvious sincerity and conviction,

The music often uses modal melodies with biblical associations and while some material is a little repetitive, and sometimes saccharine, there were some very exciting and moving moments,

Helen Foster was a quietly effective, dignified narrator, while left-handed conductor Wylie managed very capably his large forces including an orchestra of amateurs and professionals.

John Noble, "The Courier-Mail", Brisbane, Queensland (1991).

2. Testimonies

"The Jerusalem Passion" was an inspirational experience for me. One could not help but share deeply in the Lord's vision that *"we all may be one in Him"*. Murray Wylie's brilliant blend of classical and modern music was faultlessly presented by singers, choir and musicians. I gladly commend *"The Jerusalem Passion"* as a must for all who love the Lord and enjoy great music.
Rev Barrie Cutchie, Church of Christ.

I found *"The Jerusalem Passion"* appealing with its vibrant and vital musical expression of the Gospels. It swept me away together with the chorus, orchestra, soloists, conductor and audience, like an irresistible stream. It is indeed a true rally for Christ with its message in sounds nobody can resist.

Rev P Kemeny, Lutheran Church.

The Word of God is something alive and active. It has the power to reach down into the very core of our being and give new life. This was never so true for me than Scripture's message of unity when presented in Murray Wylie's oratorio *"The Jerusalem Passion"*. Out of the opened side of Christ there came a new hope, a new vision: *"They shall hear My voice, and they will know My voice, and they shall come. And they shall be one."* We have Christ's word for it. We shall be one. This must become our passion.

Father David Brown, Catholic Church.

"The Jerusalem Passion" is a triumphant spiritual and musical treat. It is a superb blend of classical and contemporary musical forms. ...It was a tremendous faith experience, a great appeal for Christian unity. I'm sure that by the time we came to *"The Communion Song"* at the end we were all praying that in the not too distant future we shall all indeed meet at *"the table of friends"*.

Sister Margaret Hoff, Catholic Church.

There was a stirring of the Spirit within me evoked by *"The Jerusalem Passion"* as my deepest yearnings as a Christian found expression. Indeed the passion of Jesus for the whole creation, His agony, His sorrow, His love, His courage, His obedience, His wonderful vision of the New Jerusalem and the glorious hope that we might all be one embraces me and heightens my own passion.

Rev John Blaze, Uniting Church.

"The Jerusalem Passion" oratorio is uniquely Christian and is a genuinely uplifting musical experience. As a Christian music lover, I was delighted to hear other Christians expressing with excellence, the powerful message of our unity in Christ, and the certainty of its fulfilment.

Adrian Turner, Monbulk Christian Fellowship.

My wife and I attended ***"The Jerusalem Passion"*** oratorio with some friends and we were all agreed it was a top class presentation. "Excellence for the Lord" stood out to me from so fine a production which earned the respect of so many people who love Him! The theme of Christian unity which is expressed in the oratorio is likewise on the hearts of so many people today, and is very timely. All who took part in that presentation have our admiration for the high quality with which our Lord was honoured.

Pastor J Primrose, Assemblies of God.

Special Note

As a testimony to the impact of this song from the Lord, mention should be made of the numerous letters and personal reports received from those who were in a time of grief when ***"The Jerusalem Passion"*** found them and ministered deeply to them. Parents who lost a child of ten, a mother who lost a child of three, bereaved husbands and wives, and many others have related how the song ***"Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit"*** has touched and comforted them. Praise the Name of the Lord!