

# PREFACE

Frank Martin<sup>1</sup> hailed from a Huguenot family that, after fleeing Provence in 1752, settled by Lake Geneva. His grandfather – originally a factory owner in Manchester – was the first bassoonist in the Geneva Music Society, as well as its treasurer, and co-founded the Geneva Conservatory in 1835. Martin's father was a Calvinist minister, while his mother, Pauline (née Duval), came from a Russian noble family. Frank Martin, born on September 15, 1890, was the youngest of ten children.

Music played an important role in the family's life. Martin put his first compositions to paper at the age of nine. He spent much time improvising on the piano, later recalling a preference for minor chords and a much greater interest in harmonies than melodies. Nevertheless, his music would later often be described as song-oriented or vocal,<sup>2</sup> regardless of genre, with vocal music ultimately becoming a focal point of his output. A defining moment for the twelve-year-old came with a performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion in 1903. Bach's music remained a pivotal influence throughout his life.

Aged sixteen, Martin already knew he wanted to become a composer. From 1906 to 1914, he studied piano, music theory, and composition with Joseph Lauber, a student of Rheinberger and Massenet. However, he never formally pursued a music degree. Instead, from 1908 to 1910, at the request of his parents, he studied mathematics and

physics before embarking on a career in music. The passing of his mother in 1911 certainly had a profound impact.

In 1974, Martin recalled that during this time at home he only got to know Bach, Schumann (*Lieder*) and Chopin (*Préludes*), until he was particularly influenced by the music of César Franck and especially its modal harmony. In addition, he mentioned Strauss and Mahler, whose works he experienced in symphony concerts.

Ernest Ansermet, a Swiss conductor arriving in Geneva in 1917, played a significant role in Martin's career. He not only programmed more new French repertoire but also advocated for contemporary music,<sup>3</sup> especially Swiss composers, and led the majority of Martin's premieres in the following decades. He also introduced the emerging composer to the works of Ravel and, particularly, Debussy, with Debussy's *Fêtes* from *Trois Nocturnes* having been a particular "revelation" to Martin, due to its "straightforward song-like form."<sup>4</sup> Other sources also mention music of Mozart, Wagner, and Fauré, which Martin became acquainted with in his early years.

In 1918, Martin married Odette Micheli after serving as a *sergent téléphoniste* during the war. The subsequent years were marked by travels and relocations to Zurich, Rome (1921/22), and Paris (from 1924), where Martin encountered music by Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Honegger, Milhaud, and jazz. Throughout the 1920s, he explored rhythm and meter deeply, not only in Ravel and Stravinsky, but also in Irish and Bulgarian folk music, as well as Eastern and ancient Greek music. Martin saw rhythm as a particular link between body and mind and already began to devise rhythmic concepts that Olivier Messiaen would similarly arrive at and refine ten years later.

According to the manuscript, the movements of the Mass were composed as follows: in 1922, while in Rome, *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo* up to "et resurrexit," and *Sanctus*; in 1924, the remainder

3 For example, Ansermet also had a lot to do with the *Ballets Russes* and Igor Stravinsky, who lived at Lake Geneva during World War I.

4 *Zodiaque*, pp. 8. All quotations from French sources in this edition are translated by the editor.

of the *Credo*; and in 1926, *Agnus Dei*. Prior to his death, Martin recalled that he had been drawn, like many composers, to the Mass text itself and its form, and that he found it "aesthetically and psychologically admirable."<sup>5</sup> He followed the traditional way of setting the Mass, which ensures a balance between the movements: the text-rich *Gloria* and *Credo* were set rather syllabically, with fugue-like structures in certain sections, while the text-sparse *Kyrie*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* feature more expansive melismas. In the context of Martin's exploration of rhythm, the Mass proves intriguing as well. It features asymmetrical meters or measures in the opening and the "Et in Spiritum Sanctum" section of the *Credo*, as well as the "Pleni sunt coeli" in the *Sanctus*. Yet, it also showcases a structuring of time reminiscent of Renaissance vocal music, flowing somewhat regardless of the barlines. In other parts, it recalls late Baroque counterpoint; the "Cum Sancto Spiritu" in the *Gloria* often being associated with Bach. Yet, the notation of this and other passages with note values twice as long, bar signatures set accordingly, in sketches and earlier versions suggests that earlier vocal polyphony was equally an inspiration – which is also evident in the harmony of the Mass.

Intriguing is also, to single out just one more feature among many, the way Martin works with gradually layered patterns in the *Benedictus* and "et resurrexit" section of the *Credo*, which is reminiscent of later minimal music. Metrical shifts – also characterizing the *Agnus Dei* – play a role here. The "et resurrexit" in the *Credo*, like the *Kyrie*'s beginning, may have been inspired by Debussy or Ravel, but perhaps also by Martin's studies beyond art music. Remarkable is the pentatonic effect here (and, for instance, in the *Sanctus*),

5 *Zodiaque*, p. 13. Key first-hand statements on the Mass can be found primarily in three sources: 1. Martin's introductory text contributed to the program for the first performance of the Mass in his presence in 1970 (see below), 2. the *Zodiaque* interview (see note 1), 3. Martin's commentary on his work, which his later widow Maria Emalia Martin-Boeke published in 1984 as part of a collection of such commentaries: Maria Martin (editor): *À propos de ... Commentaires de Frank Martin sur ses œuvres* (Neuchâtel: À la Baconnière, 1984) p. 11 (in the following: *Commentaire*). Almost entirely, 3 is identical with 1. Some wordings in 2 are very similar or even identical to those in 1 and/or 3. The Martins – Maria Martin also took on the role of assistant and agent for her husband – refined what had previously been written.

which Martin achieves even utilizing more than five notes by avoiding leading-tone relations. Furthermore, fruits of his study of Debussy can be seen, for example, in the specific use of extended chords and mixtures, such as in the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*.

The *Agnus Dei* section in the *Gloria* (mm. 58) features a characteristic of Martin's music with the drone as pedal point in Choir II.<sup>6</sup> It can also illustrate Martin's skillful organization of the two choirs, for which numerous other examples can be found: monophonic lines (*Kyrie* beginning), two-part counterpoint (*Gloria*, mm. 16), or both choirs (*Gloria*, mm. 45; *Sanctus*, mm. 35) are set stereophonically or antiphonally. The melody in one choir is accompanied by the other one (*Kyrie*, mm. 58). The parts of both choirs can be successively layered (*Gloria* opening and *Credo*, mm. 22). In contrast, the texture can be deliberately slimmed down to duo- or trio-settings in a single choir (*Credo*, mm. 39). Some sections are set for SSAA or TTBB only (*Kyrie* or *Sanctus* beginning), while others feature an interesting layering of three low, three middle, and two high voices (*Benedictus*). Also intriguing is the 'orchestration' in a *Kyrie* section, where the soprano melody of a four-part-setting in the second choir is doubled an octave below by the tenors and basses of the first choir (mm. 37). It is evident from the individual parts, as well as from the scoring noted in the draft score (see *Critical Commentary*), that the tessitura in both choirs is not identical. Choir I is set higher, Choir II lower.<sup>7</sup>

6 Pedal points can also be observed throughout the Mass, including in the *Kyrie* (mm. 59, mm. 80), *Gloria* (mm. 114), *Credo* (mm. 30, mm. 45, mm. 104, mm. 125), as well as at various points in the *Sanctus*. In his fair copy manuscript from the 1920s, under the *Sanctus* opening, Martin wrote an annotation that he later erased, the ending of which is still clearly identifiable as "fis Orgelpunkt" (f# pedal point). Shortly before his passing he (not for the first time) elaborated (*Zodiaque*, p. 10): "This [pedal points and chords circling around them] is one of the principles of my composing that I keep coming back to. It's not a procedure, but the basis of my style. A sustained note becomes a melody in its own right because, as the harmony changes, that note takes on greater and greater importance as the surrounding harmony moves farther away. In my opinion, this is one of the most essential principles of music, not only in my own writing."

7 In early versions or sketches, Martin partly configured the double-choir disposition even more tailored to this, which is immediately recognizable from the clef arrangement.

In 1926, Martin returned to Geneva, separated from his wife Odette. It is notable that among the few composers he had contact with during this time were Arthur Honegger and Benjamin Britten. All three explored avant-garde music and contemporary trends but did not strictly follow any specific school, developing their own musical languages that did not prioritize avoiding tradition. Martin found his own primarily through his confrontation with Schoenberg's dodecaphony, unmistakably – and explicitly – oriented towards Alban Berg.

However, the Mass was shelved for the time being. Martin repeatedly stressed that he had composed it not for the public, but solely for himself. In 1929/30, he worked on another sacred work, which, unlike the Mass, he never completed and would keep private throughout his life, a Christmas cantata he referred to as "Cantate sur la Nativité" or "Oratorio de Noël."<sup>8</sup>

In 1930, Odette and Frank Martin divorced. That year, he became professor for chamber music at the Geneva Conservatory, serving until 1933 and again from 1941 to 1946. He married Irène Gardian in 1931 and in 1933 accepted the positions of artistic director and lecturer at the private Geneva music school *Technicum Moderne de Musique*. Tragically, his second wife Irène passed away from sepsis in 1939. The same year the school closed; the last diploma was earned by Dutch flutist Maria Boeke, who married Martin in 1940.

Martin later emphasized that he only fully discovered his own "true" language and technique – out of conflict with Schoenberg's – at the age of about 45. This could find expression then in his secular oratorio *Le vin herbé* (premiered in 1942). He gained greater national recognition with this work, and then achieved international acclaim with his *Petite symphonie concertante* (premiered in 1946).

After the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944, the director of Radio Geneva commissioned Martin to compose an oratorio to be broadcasted on the day of the ceasefire. Martin considered only a religious work appropriate, and instead of using the proposed text from a Geneva writer, he

himself compiled texts from the Bible. The outcome, *In terra pax*, marked a first for the 55-year-old. Until then, no religious work from his pen had ever been published or performed in public, although he had composed two such works in the 1920s: the Mass and the Christmas cantata. He mentioned both of them in 1946 in talks on the occasion of a performance of *In terra pax* in Basel.<sup>9</sup> Due to an "instinctive modesty," he had done nothing to arrange for a performance; it was sufficient for him to have written these pieces, whose religious-emotional expressions he felt were too private for the public. The only possibility considered was their performance in a church, within the context of the liturgy and without the mention of the composer. Shortly before his death, Martin – who had often spoken of the spiritual in music, of its effect on the soul or spirit – confessed that he had not been able to understand his deep religious feelings for a long time. He had had to suppress an intellectual expression of these feelings and break with the way of religion his father had instilled in him, even though his father was not in the least dogmatic.

Martin confessed that his scruples about publishing religious works also stemmed from an experience with Ansermet. He had shown the Christmas cantata to his advocate when he composed it, and the latter's dismissive reaction ("We don't need something like that at the moment!") was the reason it was shelved. This is linked to Martin's statement that he did not want to publish the mass out of concern that it would be "judged solely on aesthetic grounds." In any case, Martin was able to finally find his way back to religion with *In terra pax*. He summarized: "So there was a rather longer break [from composing religious works] triggered by Ansermet's warning remark, and then came 'In terra pax,' which I wrote with fervent conviction because I no longer had any scruples, because I had to do it. It freed me from a kind of inhibition. I was completely sure that I wouldn't lie, for I had always been impressed and paralyzed by the danger of hypocrisy, which is so great and feared in the realm of religious music."<sup>10</sup>

9 Frank Martin: *Un compositeur médite sur son art: Ecrits et pensées recueillis par sa femme* (Neuchâtel: À la Baconnière, 1977), pp. 121.

10 Regarding all statements and quotes in this paragraph: *Zodiaque*, pp. 12–14, as well as *Commentaire*, p. 11.

Interestingly, Martin reused the passage from the Mass for "Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine. ET HOMO FACTUS EST." (capital letters as in the manuscript's text underlay) in the Christmas cantata, transposed down a whole tone and rearranged for six-part choir, strings, and organ. Both works remained unpublished, allowing Martin to repurpose this music for his grand Passion oratorio, *Golgotha*, premiered in 1949. The creation of *Golgotha*, without a commission, is also owed to Martin's breakthrough-experience with *In terra pax*.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the music from the 1920s about the birth of Jesus was heard publicly for the first time, but in a Passion work with the text "as he had loved his own in the world, he loved them with the highest love." In 1970, nearly fifty years after Martin first put the "Et incarnatus est" passage to paper, he cited it in his introductory text for the first performance of the Mass in his presence, in 1970 in Ghent (see below), as an example of parts that were still particularly close to him.

In 1946, Martin and his wife moved to Bergen aan Zee in North Holland, then to Amsterdam shortly thereafter. Commuting from the Netherlands, he served as professor of composition at the *Staatliche Hochschule für Musik*, now the *Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln*, until his retirement in 1957. There, Karlheinz Stockhausen received his first composition lessons from Martin in 1950. In Amsterdam, Martin struck up a friendship with Felix de Nobel, who conducted several performances of the Mass's *Agnus Dei* in Martin's presence. In 1956, the Martins relocated to Naarden, east of Amsterdam. During this time, Martin composed the music theater work *La tempête*, premiered in 1956, and the oratorio *Le Mystère de la Nativité*, premiered in 1959.

In 1962, Hamburg church musician Franz-Wilhelm Brunnert, aware of Martin's Mass listed in the composer's catalogue of works, requested a perusal score. Finally, on November 2, 1963 – about forty years after its composition – the Bugenhagenkantorei, under Brunnert's direction, premiered the Mass at the Bugenhagenkirche in Hamburg, which was still being used for Lutheran services at the time.<sup>12</sup> Martin was not present.

11 Martin had, by the way, also reused a melody from the opening chorus of the Christmas cantata in the second part of *In terra pax*.

12 The choir later became the Winterhuder Kantorei Epiphaniien due to restructuring.

In 1965/66, Martin arranged the *Agnus Dei* for solo organ (BA 6213), fulfilling the request for a short organ piece to fill a gap in a concert program.

Martin's stance on publishing the Mass had hardly changed until then, if at all. From 1970 onwards, however, events unfolded rapidly. As research for this edition revealed, on April 16, 1970, the NCRV *VOCAAL ENSEMBLE* (Hilversum) conducted by Marinus Voorberg recorded it at the Koningskerk in Amsterdam for the *Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging* (NCRV), which is no longer in existence. The first concert performance with Frank Martin in attendance took place on June 10, 1970, at the Sint-Baafs Kathedraal, Ghent, as part of the 22nd International Heinrich Schütz Festival Breda. Contrary to some accounts, it was not the *Netherlands Radio Choir* or *Groot Omroepkoor* that performed, but again the *NCRV Vocaal Ensemble* under Voorberg's direction. Martin provided a note for the program booklet<sup>13</sup> stating that the composition was a private matter between the Mass text, the music, and the composer. Shortly before his passing, Martin, much quoted, formulated it as a matter between God and himself.<sup>14</sup>

At the Ghent concert, Martin met Karl Vötterle, the founder of Bärenreiter. Correspondence preserved in the publisher's archive documents part of the journey to publishing the Mass and related events. The Mass was performed frequently immediately after its publication in 1972. In 1975 Eric Ericson recorded the Mass with his Stockholm Chamber Choir. More than 30 commercial recordings released since then are listed on frankmartin.org.

Frank Martin remained active as a composer, pianist, and conductor until his passing on November 21, 1974, at the age of 84. His final work, *Et la vie l'emporta*, nearly completed, would have been a sacred composition. Maria Martin continued to reside in Naarden and oversee his legacy until her death in 2017 at the age of 102. Today, the former residence serves as the *Stichting Frank Martin Huis*, preserving Martin's library, study, and materials. Most manuscripts, however, are archived at the *Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel*, including the drafts and

13 [https://www.schuetzgesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/IHSF/IHSF\\_Archiv/ISG\\_1970\\_IHSF\\_Programmheft.pdf](https://www.schuetzgesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/IHSF/IHSF_Archiv/ISG_1970_IHSF_Programmheft.pdf), pp. 39.

14 *Zodiaque*, p. 12; *Commentaire*, p. 11.

fair copies of the Mass. This edition presents the first comprehensive scholarly-critical and practical release, evaluating all available sources, including the previously unknown 1970 recording.

It was only late in the preparations for this edition that it emerged that Frank Martin had spent two weeks in October 1972 working with the Dresdner Kreuzchor on *In terra pax, Golgotha*, and the Mass. The recollections of the then lead first soprano, who was consulted in June 2024, about Martin's specific instructions concerning the performance of the Mass clearly confirmed crucial decisions made for this edition (cf. Critical Commentary).

Against the backdrop of Martin's skepticism and prolonged hesitation, it is somewhat ironic that the Mass quickly became one of the most beloved choral works of the 20th century after its publication. Notably, many substantial a cappella masses emerged during this period, such as those by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1921) and

Francis Poulenc (1937), both also for double choir. However, none seem to enjoy the popularity of Martin's Mass – despite the composer's belief for nearly half a century that he had written it solely for himself.

My gratitude is first extended to Ria Raven, manager of the *Groot Omroepkoor*, who spared no effort in contacting various individuals and scouring archives. Additionally, I am grateful to the *Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel* for granting me access to the draft and fair copy scores. I am particularly thankful to Konrad Klek for sharing his knowledge about Martin and the Mass with me, and I thank Volker Hempfling and Matthias Stoffels for exchanging insights on all the Mass's editions. My gratitude also extends to the Bärenreiter-Verlag and specifically to Stefan Gros for the wonderful collaboration once again.

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