

## **In Thy Lovingkindness, O God**

(Psalm 51)

by

Henry Purcell

SATB and Accompaniment  
Ash Wednesday, Lent, General

This anthem is a short segment from a verse anthem of Henry Purcell (1659-1695), *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei*, which draws its text from Psalm 3. Now and then, over decades, I have sung and directed this anthem using the English version of 1902 that was prepared for the Coronation of King Edward VII. That version nicely pairs Purcell's music with Psalm 141:2, a verse that is a traditional element of the British Coronation Service. The opening phrase gives the anthem its English title: "Let my prayer come up into thy presence."

As Psalm 141 makes no appearance in today's Revised Common Lectionary, I thought I might attempt a version that simply translates Purcell's Latin text into English. I discovered, however, that Psalm 3 is also absent from the Lectionary. Casting about for a suitable English text, I settled upon Psalm 51, which the Lectionary assigns to Ash Wednesday of each year, and to a Lenten Sunday and two other Sundays in addition.

Recently a stronger impetus arose for attempting a new version. As I was listening to the Chester Cathedral Nave Choir perform Purcell's anthem in its original Latin, the opening phrase sent a tingle up my spine. I wondered: What is so different about this otherwise familiar music?

The answer, I discovered, is that Purcell composed his first two measures in Lydian mode. The familiar 1902 version had rendered the opening phrase in plain-vanilla major. No tingling, please, at our Coronation!

Western chordal music—as contrasted with unison chant or song—offers precious few examples of compositions in Lydian mode. In *The Hymnal 1982*, for example, the Lydian mode appears numerous times transiently, as a passing note, but never as the prevailing mode of an entire phrase.

The reason for this is not a mystery. Lydian mode is distinguished from the familiar major mode (Ionian) by its raised fourth tone. With that raised tone Lydian mode widens the natural 4th into a tritone, and with a tritone in place of the natural 4th, chordal music simply goes haywire.

To hear this, pick any simple hymn, major or minor, and play it through raising every 4th by a half step—*Rock of Ages* in the key of B-flat, say, but playing every E-flat as E-natural.

The Chester choir made me tingle because they were singing the opening phrase as Purcell wrote it—Lydian mode in the key of B-flat, where Es are E-naturals.

In this version I have followed Purcell's original in every detail of harmony and, with two exceptions, of syllable placement. My principal adaptation has been to alter Purcell's SSATB setting to SATB, taking special care not to compromise the harmonic tensions within the four, wondrous, opening measures.

Albert Blackwell  
March 31, 2012

# In Thy Lovingkindness, O God

## (Psalm 51)

Henry Purcell (1659–1695)  
arr. Albert Blackwell

English adaptation by Albert Blackwell

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass  
Acc.

In thy lov - ing - kind - ness, O God, cast me not a - way from thy  
In thy lov - ing - kind - ness, O God, cast me not a - way from thy  
In thy lov - ing - kind - ness, O God, cast me not a - way from thy  
In thy lov - ing - kind - ness, O God, cast me not a - way from thy

The first system of the musical score features four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and an Accompaniment (Acc.) part. The music is in 4/4 time and D minor. The lyrics are: "In thy lov - ing - kind - ness, O God, cast me not a - way from thy".

S  
A  
T  
B  
Acc.

pres - ence. In thy mer - cy pu - ri - fy me and for - give my sins.  
pres - ence. In thy mer - cy pu - ri - fy me and for - give my sins.  
pres - ence. In thy mer - cy pu - ri - fy me and for - give my sins.  
pres - ence. In thy mer - cy pu - ri - fy me and for - give my sins.

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal parts and accompaniment. The lyrics are: "pres - ence. In thy mer - cy pu - ri - fy me and for - give my sins.".

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S  
Cre - ate in me a clean heart, — O God;

A  
Cre - ate in me a clean heart, — O God;

T  
8  
Cre - ate in me a clean heart, — O

B  
Cre - ate in me a clean heart, — O

12

S  
vouch - safe to me thy — sav - ing joy, thy sav - ing joy.

A  
vouch - safe to me thy — sav - ing joy, thy sav - ing joy,

T  
8  
God; vouch - safe to me thy — sav - - - ing joy.

B  
God; thy sav - - - ing joy.

12

Performance suggestion: page 2 might be repeated.