

Le Point Vierge

For two voices (one high/one low) and piano

Ian Percy

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A Simple Monk and an American Lama

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Duration ca. 9' 29"

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2021

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This version of *Le Point Vierge* is a collection of three songs inspired by Thomas Merton's three meetings with Gelong Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet in the mountains of Dharamsala on 4th, 6th and 8th November, 1968. Each of the three songs is 3' 09" in length, and the theoretical duration of this triptych is 9' 29".

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Trappist monk, prolific writer and poet who offered a unique literary bridge between Western and Eastern religious thought (and between sacred and secular culture). Merton was accidentally electrocuted in Bangkok, Thailand on December 10th, 1968. Although they only met three times, the Dalai Lama has referred to Merton as 'an old friend' on numerous occasions and visited his grave at Gethsemani USA in 1996. Their three meetings have proved to be a catalyst for sustained and meaningful dialogue between the leaders of Eastern and Western religions.

Le Point Vierge, or *The Virgin Point* is Merton's concept of the closest to God we can ever be, or hope to attain. A place of absolute purity at the very centre of our being untouched by sin.

Vocal Ranges:

The work is composed for two voice soloists; one high and one low. Preferably, as the two 'implied' characters are gender specific, the high voice would be performed by a countertenor who can sing a passing F4 (bars 44 and 52). The low voice requires a bass vocalist who can sing a passing F3 (bar 110), or (preferably) a baritone who can sing a passing F1 (bars 8 and 16). Although the 'implied' characters are gender specific, one can see no reason why the upper voice could not be sung by a female alto or mezzo-soprano.

Lower Voice: F1 - F3 (middle C = C3): Ideally a baritone who can sing a passing F1 in bars 8 and 16.

Upper Voice: B^b2 - F4: Ideally a countertenor who can sing a passing F4 in bars 44 and 52.

The Text:

The words were written by the composer after a period spent in saturation with Merton's poetry. Consuming so much new information in such a short period of time blurred the content, and I penned words, phrases and sentences from memory. It was very interesting to find how different the 'recollections' were. Concepts remained in context, but memory had conflated the thematic content of various poems and interbred the construct of similar sentences. Fortunately, the words were still recognisable as Merton's, but no sentence in verbatim (or even particularly accurate). This helps to avoid the cumbersome area of copyright, which often restricts the potential for future performances. The process proved to be a fluid and productive approach. The words appeared and the 'poems' took form.

"Recollections should be seen not as an absence, but as a presence. It makes us, first of all, present to ourselves. It makes us present to whatever reality is most significant in the moment of the time in which we are living." ¹

Alternative Versions:

There is a version of this score with additional piano interludes, which can extend the programme time and alter the visual aesthetic of the performance. It is also intended that this work (in the future tense) be expanded into three short operatic scenes.

With Thanks:

Thanks are owed to friend, author and fellow academic, Dr David Torevell for 'philosophically commissioning' this work. This project emerged as a natural consequence of email conversations with David, and his enthusiasm for the piece as the idea evolved proved infectious. One 'downed tools' on other projects in order to assuage David's enthusiasm with a physical score. The piece was written and composed in a relatively short period of time. It seemed to say what it wanted to say. Sometimes, things just happen ...

"Merton admired the Hindu tradition in which all artistic work is recognised as a form of yoga. In this way, he commented, "there ceases to be any distinction between sacred and secular art. All art is Yoga, and even the art of making a table or a bed, or building a house, proceeds from the craftsman's Yoga and from his spiritual discipline of meditation." ²

¹ Thomas Merton: *No Man is an Island*, Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, 1955. Barnes & Noble, USA, 2003. p. 219

² Matthew Fox: *A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey*. New World Library, California, 2016. p. 89

Characters: Neither shall be defined, but both should be 'implied' ...

A Simple Monk (aka. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet): Lower Voice

Placing the 'Simple Monk' as a Bass voice is representative of the primary vocal in Tibetan Ritual Music – The Bass Chant (inflected monotone, recto-tono³ recitation). When asked, the Dalai Lama has often described himself as 'just a simple monk'.

Contemporary dress: Deep plum/maroon and gold/orange with a maroon or gold belt and multiple wrist beads hiding an expensive looking watch. Perhaps a Burnley FC Top? A T-shirt with 'a message'? Consider holding Mala beads (Buddhist prayer beads). Could also carry a copy of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

An American Lama (aka. Thomas Merton - Trappist Monk and Poet): Upper Voice

Setting Merton in the countertenor range alludes to the historical practice of castrati and the Western predilection of placing the melody in the upper line. Merton was referred to as 'The Jesus Lama' by the Tibetan monks during his visit to Dharamsala.

Contemporary dress: Black and white with a black belt, a cross and rosary beads. The cross could be worn as jewellery, or could be on the T-shirt. Maybe wear a Newcastle FC shirt. Could also include a denim jacket and carry a little black book (Psalter), or perhaps a book of Merton's poems. The characters could swap beads and books during the performance.

Scene:

Thomas Merton's three meetings with His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet in the mountains of Dharamsala on 4th, 6th and 8th November, 1968.

³ Solo voice intoning/reciting prayer or scripture around a single pitch resulting in extreme resonance.

Song One
... **The Grass is Always Greener** ...

A Simple Monk: (lower voice)

In Time	And the angels shine
Out Time	For all to see
Dark Clouds	The rocks and sands
Sunrise	Half a world away
Half Day	
Half Night	
Stained Hearts (from the) torchlight	And the angels shine
	For all to see
And so he said what will, will be ...	The rocks and sands
They stood on the rocks that wake before you	(Float) on a Summa breeze
Adore you	The rocks and sands
All the raging sands	
The sloping seas	
Half a world away	Half a world away
And so he cried Lost Angeles	
They stood on the rocks that melt before you	Half a world away
Adore you	Half a mile away
All the burning hands	Half a yard away
The builds they dream	

“Music is pleasing not only because of the sound but because of the silence that is in it: without the alternation of sound and silence there would be no rhythm.”⁴

⁴ Thomas Merton: *No Man is an Island*, Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, 1955. Barnes & Noble, USA, 2003, p. 127

Song Two
... Get Up Early in the Morning ...
(For upper voice and piano)

An American Lama: (upper voice)

Try to get up early in the morning
Try to get up early in the evening
Feed your soul

Goodnight old friend
We still tried

Try to get up early in the morning
Try to get up early in the evening
Tend the Garden

Old friend
Tend the Garden
... and watch as the three rocks grow ...

Tend the Garden
... and watch as the three rocks grow ...

Ceilings filled with cracks, but the cracks let warm light in

“The garden was a familiar image to monks, for they believed their central quest was to cultivate a holy space, an Edenic garden (*hortus claustralis*) where a flourishing worship of God could take place naturally.”⁵

⁵ David Torevell (discussing Merton’s *Elegy for a Trappist*), *Literature and Catholicism in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle, 2021, p. 113

Song Three

A Lullaby for the Masses

for two voices (one high/one low) and piano

An American Lama: (upper voice)

Through the breeze we hear the songs of shadows
A personal song for personal souls

To walk the roads of history

Through the breeze we hear the sounds of laughing
They seep through the air

All our schemes
All our thoughts
Have you seen the way to Shambhala?

Hold tight.
Hold tight the waking dreams that haunt you

Do you know the way?
Have you seen the way?
Shambhala

A Simple Monk: (lower voice)

Songs sung for personal souls

Weep for the lords of history

Hear the sounds of laughing

All our schemes
All our thoughts
Have you seen the way to Shambhala?

Hold tight.
Hold tight the waking dreams that haunt you

Do you know the way?
Have you seen the way to Shambhala?
Shambhala

As HH The Dalai Lama noted during the 1985 Kalachakra initiation in Bodhgaya, Shambhala is not an ordinary country:

“Although those with special affiliation may actually be able to go there through their karmic connection, nevertheless it is not a physical place that we can actually find. We can only say that it is a pure land, a pure land in the human realm. And unless one has the merit and the actual karmic association, one cannot actually arrive there.”

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[A Simple Monk and an American Lama]

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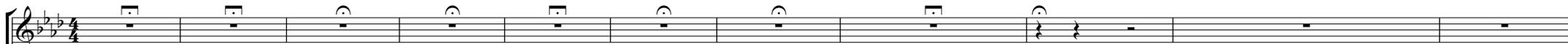
Song One: The Grass is Always Greener ...

1 ♩ = 60 ... the ceiling is filled with cracks, but the cracks let the light in ...

poco rit. [♩ = 52]

A ♩ = 60 ... Verse One ...

4
4



4 *molto rubato, molto espress.*
4 *ppp pp*



in time out time dark clouds sun-rise half day half night stained hearts torch-light And so he said what will, will be They stood on the rocks that wake__ be-fore you

Song One: The Grass is Always Greener ...

1 ♩ = 60 ... the ceiling is filled with cracks, but the cracks let the light in ...

poco rit. [♩ = 52]

A ♩ = 60 ... Verse One ...

4
4



poco rit. [♩ = 52]

B ♩ = 60 ... Verse Two ...

12

mp *pp* *p* *mp* *mf*

[hiss like a snake]

Adore you All the ra-ging sands The slo-ping seas Half a world a-way— And so he cried Lost An-gel-es They stood on the rocks that melt—be-fore you Adore you All the burn-ing hands

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal line of the musical score. It starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The music is written in a single staff. Above the staff, there are dynamic markings: *mp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, and *mf*. A performance instruction "[hiss like a snake]" is placed above the staff. The lyrics are written below the staff, with some words underlined. The music features several triplets and slurs. Above the staff, there are horizontal lines indicating phrasing or breath marks. The tempo is marked "poco rit." with a metronome marking of [♩ = 52].

poco rit. [♩ = 52]

B ♩ = 60 ... Verse Two ...

mp *pp* *ppp* *pp* *p* *mp*

Detailed description: This block contains the piano accompaniment of the musical score. It is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The music is in the same key signature as the vocal line. Above the staff, there are dynamic markings: *mp*, *pp*, *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. The piano part consists of chords and arpeggiated figures. The tempo is marked "poco rit." with a metronome marking of [♩ = 52].

C ... Chorus One ...

poco rit. [$\text{♩} = 52$]

D $\text{♩} = 60$... Chorus Two and Coda ...

22

f *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

The builds they_ dream_ And_ the an - gels_ shine_ for all to_ see_ the rocks and_ sands_ Half a world a - way_ And_ the an - gels shine for all to_ see_

C ... Chorus One ...

poco rit. [$\text{♩} = 52$]

D $\text{♩} = 60$... Chorus Two and Coda ...

mf *mp* *p* *f* *mf*

poco rit. [♩ = 52] poco rit. [♩ = 40] rit.

30

the rocks and_ sands_ a__Sum-ma breeze the rocks and_ sands_ Half__ a world__ a - way_____ Half a world a-way Half a mile a-way Half a yard a - way

mp *p* *pp* *ppp*

Detailed description: This block contains the vocal line for measures 30-37. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats. The lyrics are written below the notes. Dynamics range from mezzo-piano (mp) to pianissimo (ppp). There are slurs and breath marks over the vocal line. Triplet markings are present under the bass notes in measures 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, and 37.

poco rit. [♩ = 52] poco rit. [♩ = 40] rit.

Detailed description: This block contains the piano accompaniment for measures 30-37. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats. The piano part features chords and single notes in both hands. Dynamics range from mezzo-piano (mp) to pianissimo (ppp). Slurs and breath marks are present over the piano line.

Song Two: Wake Up Early in the Morning ...

... all is well in the garden ...

... Verse One ...

... all is well in the garden ...

2 ♩ = 60 poco rit. [♩ = 52] **E** ♩ = 96 ... be positive ... rit. **F** ♩ = 76 rit. [♩ = 52]

4
4

mp molto rubato, molto espress.

p

mp

38

Try to get up ear-ly in the morn ing try to get up ear-ly in the eve-ning feed your soul

Try to

4
4

Song Two: Wake Up Early in the Morning ...

... all is well in the garden ...

... Verse One ...

... all is well in the garden ...

2 ♩ = 60 poco rit. [♩ = 52] **E** ♩ = 96 ... be positive ... rit. **F** ♩ = 76 rit. [♩ = 52]

4
4

molto rubato, molto espress.

Ped.

Ped.

... Verse Two ...

... all is well in the garden ...

... Chorus One ...

G ♩ = 96 ... be positive ... rit.

H ♩ = 76 rit. [♩ = 52]

I accel.

50

get up ear-ly in the morn-ing try to get up ear-ly in the eve-ning tend the gar - den Tend the gar - den and watch as the

... Verse Two ...

... all is well in the garden ...

... Chorus One ...

G ♩ = 96 ... be positive ... rit.

H ♩ = 76 rit. [♩ = 52]

I accel.

... Interlude ...

... Chorus Two ...

[♩ = 66]

J ♩ = 66 ... melancholy ... poco rit. . . . [♩ = 60]

K poco rit. . . . [♩ = 52]

p

mp

p

mp

mf

59

... Interlude ...

... Chorus Two ...

[♩ = 66]

J ♩ = 66 ... melancholy ... poco rit. . . . [♩ = 60]

K poco rit. . . . [♩ = 52]

allow time for
decay to thin ...

... Coda ...

accel. [♩ = 66]

L ♩ = 60 poco rit. [♩ = 52]

mp *p* *mp* *pp*

69 _____ and ___ watch _____ as the ___ three _____ rocks grow _____ Ceil - ings filled with cracks, but the cracks let warm _____ light _____ in

... Coda ...

accel. [♩ = 66]

L ♩ = 60 poco rit. [♩ = 52]

allow time for most decay to dissipate ...

allow time for decay to dissipate naturally ...

ppp *p* *ppp*

7 6 3

Song Three: A Lullaby for the Masses ...

... living with a past, present and future ...

3 ♩ = 69 ... a universal melody for all saints and sinners ... accel. [♩ = 88] **M** rit. [♩ = 69] poco rit.

4 *mp* molto rubato, molto espress.

79

Through the breeze we hear the songs of shadows a personal song for personal souls To walk the roads of history

Songs sung for personal souls Weep for the lords of history

Song Three: A Lullaby for the Masses ...

... living with a past, present and future ...

3 ♩ = 69 ... a universal melody for all saints and sinners ... accel. [♩ = 88] **M** rit. [♩ = 69] poco rit.

4 *mp* molto rubato, molto espress.

arpeggiate/break (ad lib.) all stacked chords/intervals throughout ... allow time for decay to thin ...

Red.

... sometimes a statement must be repeated if it is to be heard ...

... we stand on the shoulders of giants (for all the faces and places we call home) ...

[♩ = 60] **N** ♩ = 69 accel. [♩ = 88]

O rit. ♩ = 69 rit.

90

Through the breeze we hear the sounds of laugh-ing they seep through the air All our schemes, all our thoughts Have you seen the way to Sham

Hear the sounds of laugh - ing All our schemes all our thoughts Have you seen the way -

... sometimes a statement must be repeated if it is to be heard ...

... we stand on the shoulders of giants (for all the faces and places we call home) ...

[♩ = 60] **N** ♩ = 69 accel. [♩ = 88]

O rit. ♩ = 69 rit.

allow time for most decay to dissipate ...

...the sun is setting and the harbour is in sight ...

[♩ = 40] **P** ♩ = 60 rit. [♩ = 50] rit. [♩ = 40]

100

pp *mp* *p*

- bha - la Hold tight hold tight the wak - ing dreams that haunt you

pp *mp*

to Sham - bha - la Hold tight hold tight the wak - ing dreams that haunt

...the sun is setting and the harbour is in sight ...

[♩ = 40] **P** ♩ = 60 rit. [♩ = 50] rit. [♩ = 40]

allow time for decay to dissipate naturally ...

allow time for most decay to dissipate ...

ppp *mp* *p* *mp*

ped.

... a closing lullaby for the masses (perhaps we will all wake up in time) ...

Q ♩ = 50 rit. [♩ = 40] rit.

107

mp *p* *pp* *ppp*

Do you know the way Have you seen the way Sham - bha - la

pp *mp* *p* *pp* *ppp*

you Do you know the way Have you seen the way to Sham - bha - la Sham - bha - la

... a closing lullaby for the masses (perhaps we will all wake up in time) ...

Q ♩ = 50 rit. [♩ = 40] rit.

allow time for decay to thin ... allow time for decay to dissipate naturally ...

pp *mp* *ppp* *p* *pp* *ppp*

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iancarlpercy@gmail.com

www.ianpercy.me.uk