

Ostin Draais:

Former Clackamas Student bares his soul through music composition.

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Contributing Writer

The 24-year-old with tousled orange locks and a nervous smile may seem unassuming, even shy—but Ostin Draais, composer and former Clackamas student, is quite open as he sits with his manuscript, ready to share his love of music with the world.

"It's just another part of my life," Ostin claims of his musical endeavors. "It's not every part of my life... people who associate someone with one particular aspect of them—it's limiting; it's really limiting."

How ironic, then, that my talk with Ostin ends up focusing so much on the music, flowing inevitably toward the creation and not its creator.

As we talk, we conjure a memory of old days, of fifty voices stirring Ostin's brilliantly placed notes to life, of dancing across hardwood as Ostin coaxes beauty and love from 88 keys.

Ostin studied music at Cleveland High School in Gladstone, and sang in the choir, while from 6th grade through High School he took piano lessons, which were key to his musical and personal development.

"Piano technique helped me out a lot," Ostin recalls, adding that his own improvisations were "one of the joys that I had" in high school, one which continues to this day.

Ostin's sudden prominence is due largely to his completed *Mass No. 1* for mixed choir, a labor four years in the making, and a labor which will be consummated in its performance by Ostin's *alma mater* the Clackamas Chamber singers this Sunday.

Ostin is a product of Clackamas' music department, and one of the finest credits to that program's excellence. He is a veteran of the Music Theory course and choral ensembles, both of which influenced him to put pen to manuscript paper and create. The result is this *Mass*, a compilation of smaller pieces written one at a time since 1996.

In exploring the movements in order of composition, it can be seen just how much of heart, mind and soul the composer has invested in his first great work. To know the *Mass* is to know Ostin.

I: Libera Me

Liberate us. Liberate us from death eternal.

"I can definitely tell that this is written early in my own writing," reflects Ostin. In fact, this movement represents the beginning of Ostin's composing career.

"I remember one day I was sitting at the piano improvising, and we had done Faure's *Requiem* [in choir]... and I remember liking the *Libera Me* text. So I just happened to play a little lick that I liked," Ostin remembers.

And so *Libera Me* was born. Naturally the next step, following creation, was performance.

Little did he realize this dream would soon become manifest.

"I was amazed," explains Ostin, upon completion of the piece, "be-

cause it had kind of come out of me... [but] I didn't think it would be accepted, for some reason."

Nevertheless he played the *Libera Me* for Choral Director Lonnie Cline and Clackamas alumn and Vocal Jazz arranger Jason Womack, who both liked it. The piece was soon performed by the Clackamas Chamber Singers.

Ostin looks back with fondness on this landmark of his musical life.

"This was one of the first pieces that got the ball rolling, and I really appreciate what [Lonnie Cline's] done," Ostin shares. "I think it's very rare that a college would perform the music of a student composer."

II: Kyrie

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Sometimes the barest suggestion can spark the greatest inspiration.

As Ostin began to stretch his compositional legs, his friend Lynn Hastings (a longtime Clackamas chorister) remarked, "You know, you should write a *Kyrie*."

As Ostin relates, "Two nights later, I did. It took me four hours."

This movement contains, no contest, the simplest text of the *Mass*.

"You have a very simple and very beautiful melody, but... out of this beautiful melody you get these harmonies that are not 'harmonic' at all," Ostin explains.

III: Sanctus

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.

How does one present the awe and mystery of *Sanctus*, the expression of the earth-shaking presence of the Almighty?

Unconventionally, of course.

"I use a harmony that you 'cannot' use—at least in Bach's terms," Ostin relates, "and that's a suspension with the major third added."

Which, in layman's terms, translates: "not what you're expecting."

"This piece doesn't really resolve," says Ostin, "until the very ending harmony... everything else up to that point has been tension of some kind."

IV: Agnus Dei

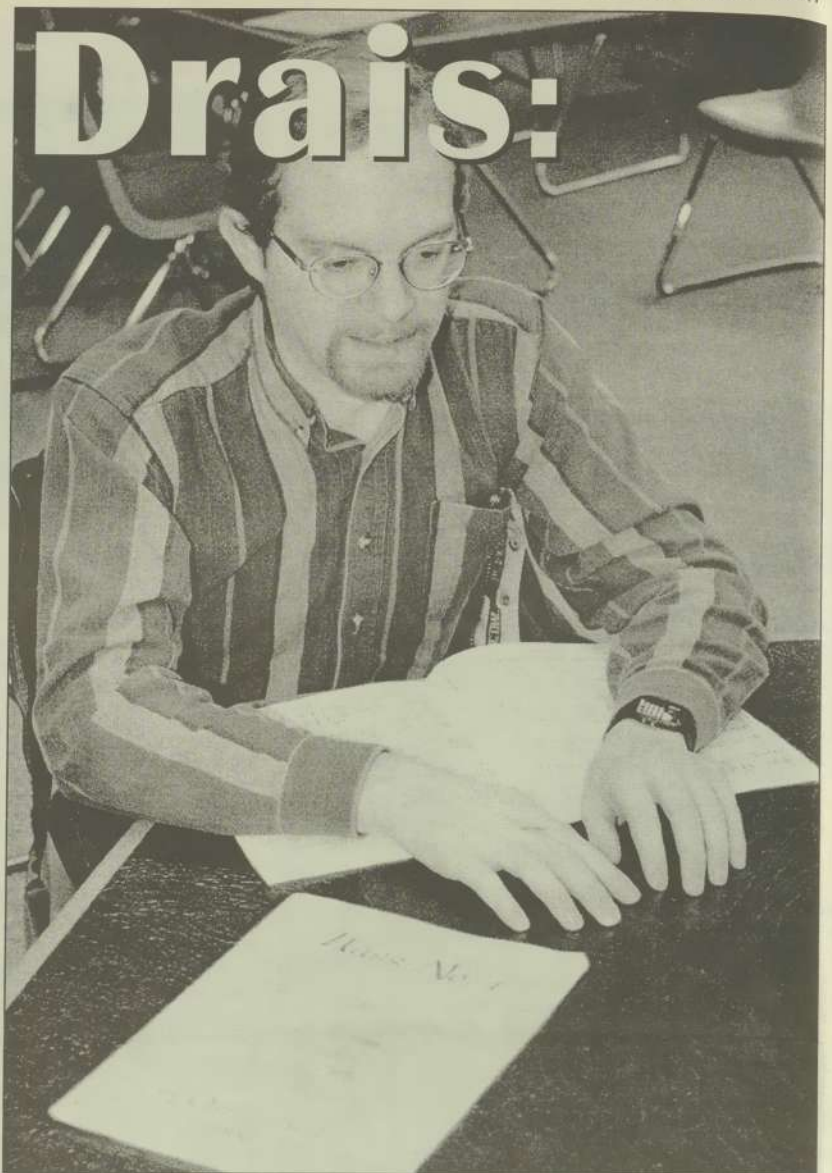
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant them eternal rest.

Now Divine experience gets personal. A relationship between humans and their Creator unfolds, and again music is called upon to express the unfathomable.

"*Agnus, Agnus, Agnus Dei*. Lamb of God," mutters Ostin, exploring even as he reminisces. "I think it might be trying to find out who it is that we're talking about. I don't know. I just wrote what I wrote."

His eyes flash as a spirit takes him. "I don't write notes; I write colors," he declares, suddenly Ostin the Sage. "I don't write music; I arrange notes."

"There's a definite reason why I say that. The music is made when it is performed... you never know what can happen, because each individual moment is different, because each individual is different, moment to moment. People grow; people learn, learn dif-



Composer Ostin Draais sits in Clackamas' Skylight Dining Room, discussing his *Mass No. 1*, a compilation of early choral works.

KARL KATZKE/Clackamas Print

ferent moods."

V: Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men of good will.

Gloria is the capstone of the *Mass*, both due to its emotive force and its placement—last, rather than second. It is also the only piece with instrumentation.

"I felt because of the power of the text, it needed to be accompanied," says Ostin. The result is a marriage of reverent and joyful voices with a lush and heartbreaking piano.

But too much joy can be a bad thing.

"To me, this piece needs to be so contained," Ostin insists. "That's where the power comes from."

This reserve is perhaps better explained in spiritual terms: "It's almost like this person who is glorifying God is scared of Him, or does not want to look, does not want to open their eyes for fear of being blinded; I'm not sure. That is the way I hear this particular piece."

VI: Credo

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

The *Credo* is perhaps the most daunting portion of the *Mass No. 1*, and likewise represents Ostin's greatest hurdle in completing the work.

"This is where I really experimented in painting, because every single thing I've written is taken straight away from the meaning of the text, and my own interpretation of it," shares Ostin.

"*Judicare vivos et mortuos*. 'Who judges the living and the dead,'" he translates, pondering, searching for words. "You have this celestial being who works with, or understands and talks to, both the living and the dead. It kind of brings everything back to earth."

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It is a high honor, indeed, for one's inmost thoughts to be given life in the voices of friends.

"I don't know if I feel like I don't deserve this," confesses Ostin. "I

don't like people with swelled heads, and I think what could be happening is, I am purposefully keeping my ego down."

Confidence is also a factor. "For a long time, I didn't really think highly of my own stuff," Ostin admits. "It took some people drumming it in [to convince me] that, 'you write good stuff.'"

The pull of these forces results in a strain between artist's humility and supporters' encouragement, and the ensuing tightrope walk is precarious to the very self.

"What I'm trying to do is keep me who I am, instead of being influenced, or tainted, if you will," says Ostin.

After all, who would want an Ostin Draais any other way?

**World premiere performance of
Mass #1 by Ostin Draais:
Performed by the Clackamas Community
Chamber Choir**

Date: March 12, 2000

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: St. Mary Cathedral in Mount Angel

Admission: \$6 adults, \$3 students