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"First they Came..."

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Brian Mark

“First They Came...”

for Vocal Quartet+String Trio

Text by Martin Niemöller

June, 2018

“First they Came...”

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me

-Text, Martin Niemöller

“First They Came...”

“*First They Came...*”, for vocal quartet (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone) and string trio, was written for the 2018 Oregon Bach Festival. I had chosen this iconic poem due to my reaction of the current political state in this country. In 2017 I was living in England at the time, and I was horrified to learn about the Executive Order 13769, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”, often referred to as the “Muslim ban” or the “travel ban,” signed by President Donald Trump on 27 January, 2017. Although this law was revised to a “watered down, politically correct version” from its predecessor, the symbolism in this poem between Nazi Germany and Trump’s America is quite alarming and “speculatively” prophetic. Clearly the ugly insidious mask of fascism is subtly creeping up into America’s homeland: anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, sexism, and of course, the hatred towards those of the Islamic faith is on the rise, and in some instances, an acceptable form of scapegoat behavior in the United States. When completing this work, by sheer “coincidence” I happen to stumble upon “The Handmaid’s Tale” TV series on Hulu, which is currently based on Margaret Atwood’s 1985 dystopian model. The main protagonist and narrator, Offred the Handmaid, makes the following observation when reflecting of her “old life” as “June” before the great fall of America’s society to the “Republic of Gilead,” which caught my eye upon creating this piece based on Niemöller’s text:

“Now I’m awake to the world. I was asleep before. That’s how we let it happen. When they slaughtered Congress, we didn’t wake up. When they blamed terrorists and suspended the constitution, we didn’t wake up then, either. Nothing changes instantaneously. In a gradually heating bathtub, you’d be boiled to death before you knew it.”

Offred’s repeated theme of “not waking up” is strikingly similar to Niemöller’s repeated stance on “not speaking out”, and the gradual “heating bathtub” could also resemble the slow purging of the collective groups from his poem. Although Atwood’s vision of a totalitarian theonomic military dictatorship is not so quite far off from the Trump presidency, there are symptoms in our current political climate that are parallel to the Republic of Gilead. It is my hope that my musical approach to Niemöller written in 2018 is a cautionary tale, rather than being a prologue for what could transpire if we are not careful. Moreover, I will close this commentary of my musical rendition to Martin Niemöller’s “*First they Came...*” by stating a very special historical quote as a dire warning: “*Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.*” (George Santayana)

“*First they Came...*” has been selected as a Finalist for the 2020 American Prize in the Composition Vocal Chamber Music Division Category.

-Brian Mark

written for the Oregon Bach Festival
"First They Came..."

Martin Niemöller

Dedicated to Dr. Yetta Howard

Brian Mark

Forceful! (♩ = 120-130)

fff *mp (subito)*

Soprano: First they came! First they came! First they came! (they came)

Alto: First they came! First they came! First they came! (they came)

Tenor: First they came! First they came! First they came!

Baritone: First they came! First they came! First they came!

Forceful! (♩ = 120-130)

fff *ffp* *slow gliss* *(on third beat)*

Violin: *fff* *ffp* *slow gliss* *(on third beat)*

Viola: *fff* *ffp* *slow gliss*

Violoncello: *fff* *ffp* *slow gliss*

S. *mf* *poco a poco accel. -----*
First they came! First they came! Then they came! Then they came!

A. *mf*
First they came! First they came! Then they came! Then they came!

T. *mf*
First they came! First they came! Then they came! Then they came!

B. *mf*
First they came! First they came! Then they came! Then they came!

Vln. *mf* *(on second beat)* *poco a poco accel. -----* *(on third beat)*

Vla. *mf* *(on second beat)* *(on third beat)*

Vc. *mf* *(on third beat)* *(on fourth beat)*

* normal bowing, repeat as two quarter notes in tempo

"First They Came..."

♩ = 150-160

S. Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! came! came! came! came! came! came!

A. Then they came! (they came!) Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! came! came! came! came! came! came!

T. Then they came! (they came!) Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! came! came! came! came! came! came!

B. Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! Then they came! came! came! came! came! came! came!

♩ = 150-160

Vln. (on first beat) (on second beat) (on third beat) (on second beat) (on second beat)

Vla. (on second beat) (on third beat) (on fourth beat) (on third beat) (on third beat)

Vc. (on third beat) (on fourth beat) (on third beat) (on third beat)

* "Scream" up on "came" to highest pitch possible

** Gliss up to highest note possible

Slightly Relaxed (♩ = 100)

ritenuto [A] Ominous (♩ = 92)

S. *f* *mf*

A. *f* *mf*

T. *f* *mf*

B. *mf*

Slightly Relaxed (♩ = 100)

ritenuto [A] Ominous (♩ = 92)

Vln. *f* *mf* *p* *pp* *con Sord*

Vla. *f* *mf* *p* *pp* *con Sord*

Vc. *f* *mf* *p* *pp* *con Sord*

slow gliss

* Repeat "I Did not Speak out" on notated pitches, legato, as a quintuplet rhythm (in tempo) before gradually ending on niente

"First They Came..."

25

S. _____

A. *mp* _____ *mf* _____
First they came _____ First they came _____ Firsty they came _____ First they came _____

T. _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____
I did not speak out _____

B. _____

Vln. _____

Vla. _____

Vc. _____

30

S. _____ *mp* _____
I did

A. _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____ *mp* _____
First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____

T. _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____ *mp* _____
I did not speak out _____ I did not speak out _____

B. _____

Vln. _____

Vla. _____

Vc. _____

"First They Came..."

35

S. *p* not speak out _____ *mp* I did not speak out _____ *p* I did not speak out I did

A. *mp* First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____

T. *p* _____ *mp* I did not speak out _____ *p* I did not speak out I did

B. _____ *mp* _____ *mf* Be - cause I was _____ not _____ a Com - mu - nist _____

Vln. *(at pitch)* _____ *p* _____ *mp* _____

Vla. *(Harmonics at pitch)* _____ *p* _____ *mp* _____

Vc. *(Harmonics at pitch)* _____ *pizz.* _____ *p* _____ *mp* _____

40

S. *mf* not speak out I did not speak out _____ *p* I did not speak out I did not speak out _____ *mf* *Spoken: I did not speak out*

A. *mf* First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ First they came _____ *pp*

T. *mf* not speak out I did not speak out _____ *p* I did not speak out I did not speak out _____ *mf* *Spoken: I did not speak out*

B. _____ *mp* not a Com - mun - ists _____ *mf* not a Com - mun - ists _____ *pp* Com - mun - ists _____ Com - mun - ists _____

Vln. _____ *p* _____ *mf* _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____

Vla. _____ *p* _____ *mf* _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____

Vc. *pizz.* _____ *p* _____ *mf* _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____

* "I did not speak out" is to be spoken repeatedly as fast as possible to a 'niente' whisper. At the start of this texture, include the "And" before the phrase only once.

"First They Came..."

B Piu Mosso (♩ = 108)

S. *mp* *mp*
So - cia - list! So - cia - list!

A.

T. *mp*
Be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be -

B.

B Piu Mosso (♩ = 108)

Vln. *pp* *mp* *pp* *p*
senza Sordino

Vla. *pp* *mp* *pp* *pp*
senza Sordino *sul tasto*

Vc. *pp* *mp* *pp* *pp*
senza Sordino *sul tasto*

S. *mp* *mp* *mp* *mf*
So - cia - list! So - cia - list! So - cia - list! They came!

A. *mp* *mp* *mp* *mf*
So - cia - list! So - cia - list! So - cia - list! They came!

T. *mp* *mp* *mp* *mf*
cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause cause be - cause I was not a So - cia - list be - cause

B. *mp* *mf*
So - cia - list! They came!

Vln. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*
normale

Vc. *mp* *pp* *pizz.* *p*

"First They Came..."

56 *mf* *mf* *mf*

S. And I did not speak out I did not speak out I did not speak out

A. And I did not speak out I did not speak out I did not speak out I did not speak out

T. be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be - cause be -

B. *mf*
So - cia - list

56 *pp* *pp* *pp*

Vln. *sul Ponticello*

Vla. *sul Ponticello*

Vc. *sul Ponticello*

61 *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

S. I did not speak out

A. out

T. cause be - cause I was not a So - cia - list not a So - cia - list

B. *mf* They came! *f* *mp* So - cia - list!

61 *mp* *mp* *mp*

Vln. *mp* *normale* *mf*

Vla. *mp* *normale* *mf*

Vc. *mp* *mf* *col Legno battuto*

64 *f*
 S. *Spoken: I did not speak out*

A. *f*
Spoken: I did not speak out

T. *mp* *p* *f*
Spoken: I did not speak out

B. *f*
Spoken: I did not speak out

Vln. *mp* **

Vla. *mp* **

Vc. *mp* *arco*

* "I did not speak out" is to be spoken repeatedly as fast as possible to a 'niente' whisper.
 At the start of this texture, include the "And" before the phrase only once.

** Play figures in box repeatedly, legato, in varying order, triplet rhythm.

Do not align with other instrumentalist. Gradually transition to sixteenth note rhythms until bar 72.

68 *mf* *poco accel.*

S. Then they came And I did not speak out

A. *pp* *mp*
 U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion

T. *pp* *mp*
 U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion - ists U - nion

B. *mf*
 Then they came And I did not speak out

Vln. *poco accel.*

Vla. *poco accel.*

Vc. *mp* *gradually to sul Ponticello before going back to normale*

"First They Came..."

72 *ff* *f* $\text{♩} = 132$

S. The trade! Un - ion - ist! Then they came And

A. *p* *f* *mf subito*
They came they came they came they came they came they came un - ion - ist un - ion - ist un - ion - ist un - ion - ist

T. *p* *f* *mf*
They came they came they came they came they came the trade the trade the trade

B. *ff* *f*
The trade! Un - ion - ist! Then they came And

Vln. $\text{♩} = 132$
gliss *mf*

Vla. *gliss* *mf*

Vc. *gliss* *mf*

76 *poco a poco accel.* *f*

S. I did not speak out Speak out!

A. *mp* *mf* *p* *f* *mp* *mp*
un - ion - ists trade un - ion - ists trade they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came

T. *mp* *mf* *p* *f* *mp* *mp*
un - ion - ists trade un - ion - ists trade they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came they came

B. *f*
I did not speak out Speak out!

Vln. *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Anxious (♩ = 152-160)

S. *ff* They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews!

A. *mf* came they came they came they came *f* Then they came Then they came *ff* They came for the Jews! *f* Then they came Then they came *ff* They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews!

T. *mf* came they came they came they came *f* Then they came Then they came *ff* They came for the Jews! *f* Then they came Then they came *ff* They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews!

B. *ff* They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews! They came for the Jews!

Anxious (♩ = 152-160)

Vln. *ff* *gliss*

Vla. *ff* *gliss*

Vc. *ff* *gliss*

* Gliss up to highest note possible

C Holding Back (♩ = 126)

S. *fff* They came They came for the Jews! *mp* And I did not speak out

A. *fff* They came They came for the Jews! *p* They came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came

T. *fff* They came They came for the Jews! *p* They came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came

B. *fff* They came They came for the Jews! *mp* I did not speak

C Holding Back (♩ = 126)

Vln. *fff* *p*

Vla. *fff* *p* *sul tasto Galloping like a horse*

Vc. *fff* *p* *pizz.* *Oscillating Gliss*

* Slight pause

"First They Came..."

93 *mf*

S. Be-cause I was not a Jew

A. Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Theyn they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came

T. Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came came they came Then they came Then they came Then they came

B. *mf*
out I did not speak out I did not speak out

Vln. *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp* Oscillating Gliss

98 *mp* *accel.* -----

S. And I did not speak out Be-cause I was not a Jew I was not a

A. they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came for

T. they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came Then they came for me

B. *mp*
I did not speak out I did not speak out not a Jew

Vln. *p* Galloping like a horse *accel.* ----- Oscillating Gliss

Vla. *p* Oscillating Gliss

Vc. *p*

Piu Mosso (♩ = 132-140)

S. *mf*
Jew I was not a Jew I did not speak out I did not speak out I did not speak

A. *mf*
me I was not a Jew I did not speak out I did not speak out ³ did

T. *mf*
I did not speak I did not speak

B. *mf*
I did not speak I did not speak

Piu Mosso (♩ = 132-140)

Vln. *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *pizz.*
mf

106 *f* *accel.*

S. out I did not speak out did not speak out did not speak out did not speak out did not speak out speak out not speak out speak out

A. *f* *mf*
not speak out I did not speak out I did not speak out

T. *f* *mf*
I did not speak out I did not speak out

B. *f* *mf*
I did not speak out I did not speak out

106 *gliss.* *f* *mf* *accel.*

Vln. *gliss.* *f* *mf*

Vla. *gliss.* *f* *mf*

Vc. *normale*
f *mf*

"First They Came..."

♩ = 132-144

Repeat "I did not speak out" on selected pitches, variably, as past as possible, with a tone of panick, shaking, and hysteria, gradually bring in the Bb on bar 112., and try to end the phrase "I did not speak" until you arrive at "out" on bar 115.

S. *ff* ***** *fff* out

A. *ff* I did not speak I did not speak out *fff* ******

T. *ff* I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not speak out *fff* ******

B. *ff* I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not I did not speak out *fff* ******

♩ = 132-144

Vln. *ff* *******

Vla. *ff* *******

Vc. *ff* *******

- ff* * Gliss to a D (octave higher) if the desired E is not attainable.
- ** "Scream" up on "out" to highest pitch possible
- *** Play figures in box repeatedly, legato, in varying order, as fast as possible
- **** Gliss up to highest note possible

D Spacious but not Dragging (♩ = 120)

S. *mf* Then they came

A. *mf* ***** They came Com - mun - ists Jew

T. *mf* ***** They came Soc - ia - lists Jew

B. *mf* ***** They came U - nion - ists Jew

D Spacious but not Dragging (♩ = 120)

Vln. *mf*

Vla. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

* Repeat "They Came" in a eighth note rhythm, occassionally bring in triplet figure (Communists, Socialists, and Unionists, respectively), and also the eighth note figure "Jews" with a slight more accent/volume. Do not slow down rhythm when conductor brings down tempo; fade out to niente by the end of bar 132. Do not align with other performers.

124 *poco a poco rit.* -----

S. Then they came _____ Then they came _____ Then they came _____ Then they came _____

A. *mp*

T. *mp*

B. *mp*

Vln. *poco a poco rit.* ----- *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

130 *mp* *poco rit.* -----

S. Then they came _____ Then they came _____ Then they came _____ Then they came for me _____ Then they came for me _____ Then they came for _____

A. _____

T. _____

B. _____

♩ = 100

130 *p* *pp* *sul tasto* *poco rit.* -----

Vln. *p* *pp* *sul tasto*

Vla. *p* *pp* *sul tasto*

Vc. *p* *pp* *sul tasto*

♩ = 100

"First They Came..."

136 *mf* $\text{♩} = 80$

S. *mf* *mp* *p*
 — me — And there was no one left — And there was no one left — And there was no one left —

A. *mf* *mp* *p*
 Com - mun - ists So - cia - lists U - nion - ists

T. *mf* *mp* *p*
 Com - mun - ists So - cia - lists U - nion - ists

B. *mf* *mp* *p*
 Com - mun - ists So - cia - lists U - nion - ists

136 $\text{♩} = 80$

Vln. *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*
sul tasto

Vla. *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*
sul tasto

Vc. *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *p*
sul tasto

142 *allargando* *p* *pp* *a tempo* ($\text{♩} = 80$)

S. *p* *pp*
 And there was no one left — To speak out for me —

A. *pp* *ppp*
 the Jews

T. *pp* *ppp*
 the Jews

B. *pp* *ppp*
 the Jews

142 *allargando* *p* *pp* *a tempo* ($\text{♩} = 80$)

Vln. *p* *pp* *pp*
con Sord

Vla. *p* *pp* *pp*
con Sord

Vc. *p* *pp* *pp*
con Sord

* Repeat ad lib until niente 4x. The Soprano will stop at end of breathe cycle.

June, 2018
Brooklyn, NYC