Commissioned by RTÉ lyric fm
Adam Lay yBounden

Adam Lay yBounden is a text written in England around 1400. Mediaeval thinkers believed that Adam (and other notable Old Testament figures) were stuck in limbo until the crucifixion of Christ, and this idea is the subject of the text, which is 'macaronic', meaning it combines different languages.

I got to know these words from a beautiful setting of them by Boris Ord which I used to sing as a choirboy in St Bartholomew’s Church in Dublin. The strange text is tense and explosive, and the idea that the whole story hinged on a stolen apple drew me in as a small child, and I looked forward to singing it every advent – I think I was by far my favourite carol. When I was commissioned to write a carol by RTÉ lyric fm, the text jumped at me as I began working on a frosty winter evening.

My setting is dedicated to Malcolm Wisener, who was my choirmaster and without whom I could never have become a composer.

Synopsis:
Adam lay bound in limbo for so long that 4000 winters passed without his noticing. And his imprisonment was simply because of the apple that he took from Eve, according to the ancient books. But if Adam hadn’t eaten the apple, then Mary never would have become Queen of Heaven, because Christ would not have been born man and died for our sins. Because of this, the time when the apple was eaten is blessed, and we must praise God.

The poem closes with the words ‘Deo Gratias’, which is a very common Latin refrain meaning ‘Thanks be to God’. Interestingly, many composers throughout the ages have signed their music with this phrase and the date it was finished, as a way to devote their work to God.

Line by line explanation of text:

Adam lay ybounden,  Adam lay bound,
Bounden in a bond;  Bound in a bond
Four thousand winter,  Four thousand winters
Thought he not too long.  Didn’t seem a long time to him.

And all was for an apple,  And all because of an apple,
An apple that he took.  An apple that he took.
As clerkes finden,  As clerks find written,
Written in their book.  written in their book

Ne had the apple taken been,  Had not the apple been taken,
The apple taken been,  the apple been taken,
Ne had never our ladie,  Then Never would our Lady
Abeen heav’ne queen.  have become heaven’s Queen.

Blessed be the time  Blessed be the time
That apple taken was,  That apple taken was,
Therefore we moun singen.  Therefore we must sing:
Deo gratias!  Deo gratias! (Thanks be to God)

1 the text has also been modernised from Middle English into something more easily readable
**Pronunciation of non-standard words:**
lay ybounden = lay ee-bounden (lay and bounden as normal, very quick ee)
clerkês = cler - kez
finden = fin-den (as in German, fin as a fish’s fin, den as a fox’s den)
Ne = Nay (rhymes with hay)
Ladie = lady
Abeen heav’ne queen = a-been heav-eh-knee (heav as in heaven) queen
Blessed = bless-ed
moun = (moun as in mound)
singen. = sing-en

*Deo gratias!* = Day-oh grah-tsee-ahs (In my setting, this word is left unfinished)

**Performance Notes:**

A good performance of my setting of *Adam Lay yBounden* will be flexible in tempo, as much or as little as wished by the performers.

The length of commas between phrases is also flexible, whatever makes musical sense to the performers.

The semiquaver tied to a crotchet in the first phrase can be seen simply as a very short fermata (pause), and does not need to be counted accurately.

The passages with staccato repeated notes (first appearing bar 6) should be performed so that they are dramatically contrasting with the music around them.

The Maestoso tempo can be particularly free, whatever is most beautiful.

Careful attention should be paid to the expression marks (such as *traquillo*, *misterioso*, *risoluto*), as these quick changes of feeling are what will make a performance beautiful.

The solo Deo Graci which closes the piece should sound like an unfinishing echo of the opening.
SATB - B minor version

To Malcolm Wisener

Adam Lay yBounden

S. Adams
(24 - 30 Nov 15)

Poco Lento (\( \dot{\text{-}} = \text{c. 60} \))

\( p \) molto legato e misterioso

SOPRANO
ALTO

A - dam lay y-bound - en, Boun - den in a bond;

\( p \) molto legato e misterioso

TE...
Maestoso

\textit{la - dy} A-been Hea-ve-né Queen Bles - sèd be the

\textit{risoluto molto legato} \textit{pp} \textit{p cresc. poco a poco}

\textit{Tempo Primo}

\textit{time} poco rit. That ap - ple ta - ken

\textit{sop. solo} \textit{p semplice - poco meno legato}

\textit{was.} There-fore we moun sing-en\textit{(altos only- others sustain 'was')}

\textit{De - o Gra - ci} De - o Gra - ci De - o Gra - ci De - o Gra - ci
Adam Lay yBounden

Poco Lento (♩ = c. 60)

\( p \) molto legato e misterioso

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

A - dam lay y-bond-en, Boun-den in a bond;

\( p \) molto legato e misterioso

\( f \) feroce \( pp \) almost whispered

\( p \) legato e misterioso

Alto SOLO

An ap-ple that he took, As cler-kès fin-den writ-ten in their book.

\( f \) feroce \( pp \) almost whispered

\( p \) legato e misterioso

(TUTTI)

And Né had The ap-ple ta-ken been Né had ne-ver our

\( p \) molto tranquillo non legato \( \text{legato} \)

\( mp \) f
risoluto molto legato

Maestoso

$p$ cresc. poco a poco

la - dy - A-been Hea-ve-né Queen Bles - séd be the

risoluto molto legato

$p$ cresc. poco a poco

Tempo Primo

$pp$ molto legato e tranquillo

time poco rit. That ap - ple ta - ken

dim. $pp$ molto legato e misterioso

Sop. SOLO

$p$ semplice - poco meno legato

was. There-fore we moun sing-en De - o Gra - ci

(alto's only- others sustain 'was')

De-o Gra-ci De-o Gra-ci De-o Gra-ci De-o Gra-ci
Two part version

Adam Lay yBounden

S. Adams
(24 - 30 Nov 15)

Poco Lento (= c. 60)

A dam lay y bound-en, Boun-den in a bond; Four thou-sand win-ter

To Malcolm Wisener

Soprano

Alto

Optional Keyboard Accomp.

Thought he not too long, And all for an ap-ple,

S.

A.

Pno.
An apple that he took, As cler-kes fin-den

An apple that he took, As cler-kes fin-den writ-ten in their book.

And Né had The apple ta-ken been Né had ne-ver our

And Né had The apple ta-ken been Né had ne-ver our
Maestoso

\[ \text{risoluto} \]
\[ \text{molto legato} \]
\[ \text{pp} \]

\[ \text{Maestoso} \]
\[ \text{p cresc. poco a poco} \]

Lady A been Heave-né Queen Bles-sèd be the

\[ \text{Maestoso} \]
\[ \text{p cresc. poco a poco} \]

\[ \text{Tempo Primo} \]
\[ \text{pp molto legato e tranquillo} \]

\[ \text{Tempo Primo} \]
\[ \text{pp molto legato e tranquillo} \]

\[ \text{Tempo Primo} \]
\[ \text{pp molto legato e tranquillo} \]
was.

De - o Gra - ci

was.

Therefore we mourn sing-en

De - o Gra - ci De - o Gra - ci De - o Gra - ci De - o Gra - ci