

Adam Lay yBounden

Sebastian ADAMS

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 languages¹.

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, Bounden in a bond; Four thousand winter, Thought he not too long.	Adam lay bound, Bound in a bond Four thousand winters Didn't seem a long time to him.
And all was for an apple, An apple that he took. As clerkes finden, Written in their book.	And all because of an apple, An apple that he took. As clerks find written, written in their book
Ne had the apple taken been, The apple taken been, Ne had never our ladie, Abeen heav'ne queen.	Had not the apple been taken, the apple been taken, Then Never would our Lady have become heaven's Queen.
Blessed be the time That apple taken was, Therefore we moun singen. <i>Deo gratias!</i>	Blessed be the time That apple taken was, Therefore we must sing: <i>Deo gratias! (Thanks be to God)</i>

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*)

clerkés = 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 unfinished echo of the opening.

Adam Lay yBounden

S. Adams
(24 - 30 Nov 15)

Poco Lento (♩ = c. 60)

p molto legato e misterioso

SOPRANO
ALTO

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

TENOR
BASS

p molto legato e misterioso

3

Four thou - sand win - ter Thought he not too long, And all for an ap - ple,

6

f feroce pp almost whispered *p legato e misterioso* **Alto SOLO** *p*

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*

8

(TUTTI) *mp* *f* *pp* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

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

mp *f* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

13 *risoluto molto legato pp* **Maestoso** *p cresc. poco a poco*

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

risoluto molto legato pp *p cresc. poco a poco*

19 **Tempo Primo** *f* *dim.* *pp molto legato e tranquillo*

time That ap - ple ta - ken

f *dim.* *poco rit.* *pp molto legato e tranquillo*

dim. *pp molto legato e misterioso*

26 **Sop. SOLO** *p semplice - poco meno legato*

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

p semplice - poco meno legato

(altos only- others sustain 'was')

28 *p* *p* *p* *p*

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

p *p* *p* *p*

Adam Lay yBounden

S. Adams
(24 - 30 Nov 15)

Poco Lento (♩ = c. 60)

p molto legato e misterioso

SOPRANO
ALTO

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

TENOR
BASS

p molto legato e misterioso

3

Four thou - sand win - ter Thought he not too long, And all for an ap - ple,

6

f feroce pp almost whispered *p legato e misterioso* **Alto SOLO**
p

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*

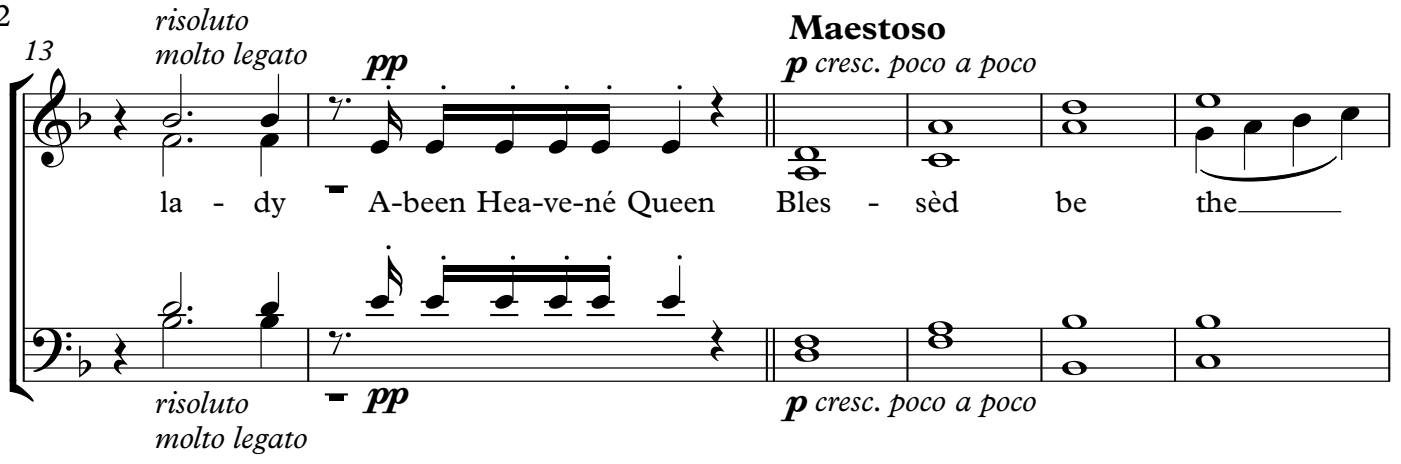
8

(TUTTI)
mp *f* *pp* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

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

mp *f* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

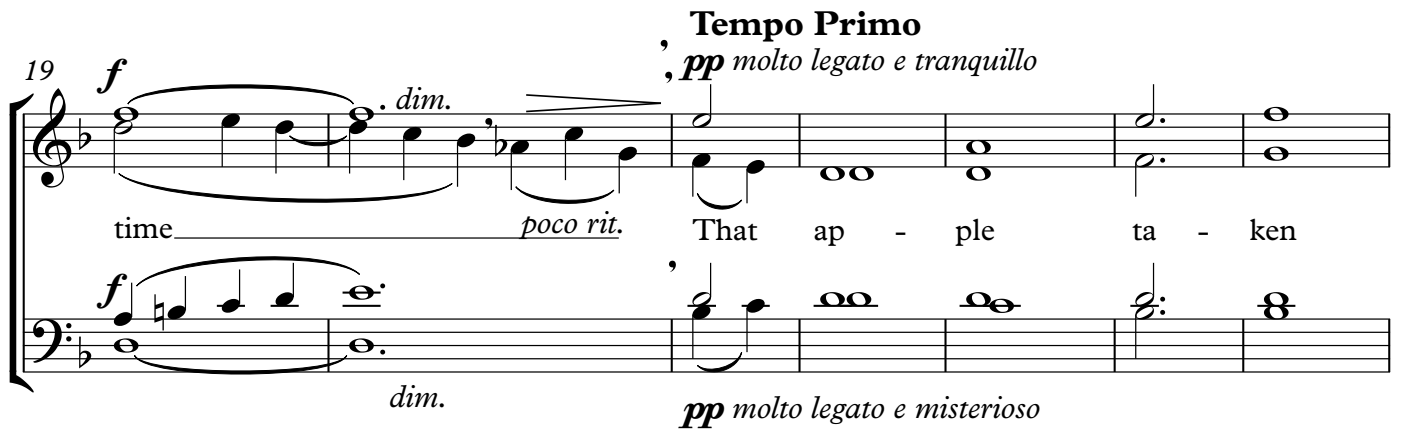
13 *risoluto molto legato pp* **Maestoso** *p cresc. poco a poco*



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

risoluto molto legato pp *p cresc. poco a poco*

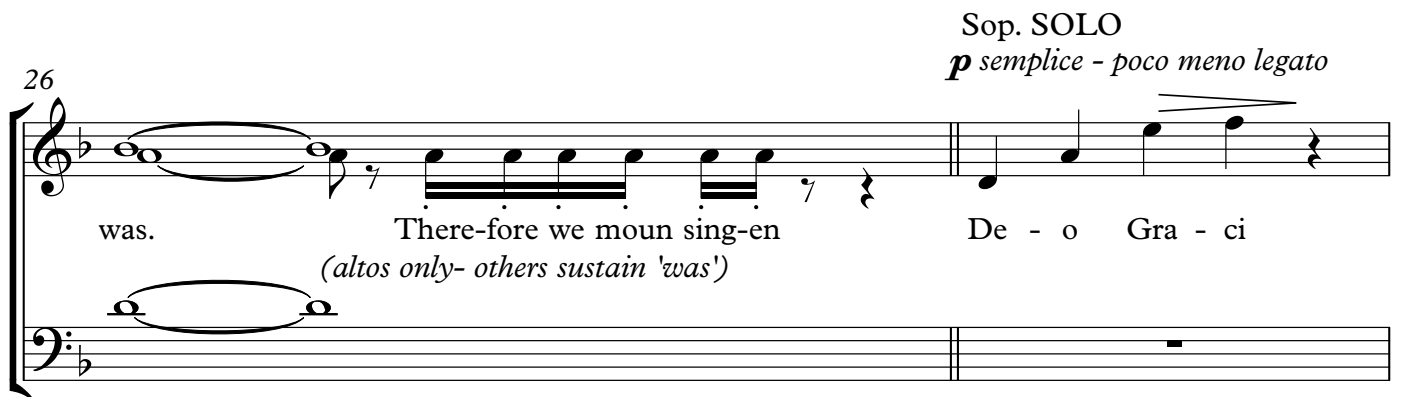
19 *f* **Tempo Primo** *pp molto legato e tranquillo*



time That ap - ple ta - ken

f *dim.* *poco rit.* *pp molto legato e misterioso*

26 **Sop. SOLO** *p semplice - poco meno legato*



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

(altos only- others sustain 'was')

28 *p*



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

Two part version

To Malcolm Wisener

Adam Lay yBounden

S. Adams
(24 - 30 Nov 15)

Poco Lento (♩ = c. 60)
p molto legato e misterioso

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

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

Optional Keyboard Accomp.
Poco Lento (♩ = c. 60)
p molto legato e misterioso

♯ * ♯ *

4

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

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

Pno.

6 *f feroce pp almost whispered* *p legato e misterioso*

S. An ap-ple that he took, As cler - kès_ fin - den

A. *f feroce pp almost whispered* *p legato e misterioso* SOLO *p*
An ap-ple that he took, As cler - kès_ fin - den writ-ten in their book.

Pno. *f feroce* *p legato e misterioso*

8 *mp* *f* *pp* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

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

A. TUTTI *mp* *f* *pp* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*
And Né had_____ The ap-ple ta - ken been Né had ne - ver our

(TUTTI)

Pno. *mp* *f* *sub p.* *pp* *p molto tranquillo non legato* *legato*

13 *risoluto molto legato pp* **Maestoso** *p cresc. poco a poco*

S. la - dy A been Hea - ve - né Queen Bles - sèd be the _____

risoluto molto legato *p cresc. poco a poco*

A. la - dy Bles - sèd be the _____

Maestoso *p cresc. poco a poco*

Pno. *risoluto molto legato*

Red. *

19 **f** *dim.* **Tempo Primo** *pp molto legato e tranquillo*

S. time _____ *poco rit.* That ap - ple ta - ken

f *dim.* *pp molto legato e tranquillo*

A. time _____ *poco rit.* That ap - ple ta - ken

f *dim.* *poco rit.* **Tempo Primo** *pp molto legato e tranquillo*

Pno. *poco rit.*

26

p semplice - poco meno legato
SOLO

S. was. De - o Gra - ci

A. was. There -fore we moun sing -en

Pno.

28

p De - o Gra - ci *p* De - o Gra - ci *p* De - o Gra - ci *p* De - o Gra - ci

A.

Pno.