"Prayer of the Children" - The Story Behind the Song.

Over the years, I've written many songs with melodies more memorable, lyrics more poetic, and harmonies richer. But none of my compositions has had the kind of reach and emotional effect of *Prayer of the Children*. Ironically, I never intended to publish the song at all. I wrote it out of frustration over the horrendous civil war and ethnic cleansing taking place in the former country of Yugoslavia.

Having lived in this now war-torn country back in the late 1970's, I grew to love the people with whom I lived. It didn't matter to me their ethnic origin - Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian - they were all just happy fun people to me and I counted as friends people from each region. Of course, I was always aware of the bigotry and ethnic differences that bubbled just below the surface, but I always hoped that the peace this rich country enjoyed would continue indefinitely. Obviously that didn't happen.

When Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito died, different political factions jockeyed for position and the inevitable happened - civil war. Suddenly my friends were pitted against each other. Serbian brother wouldn't talk to Croatian sister-in-law. Bosnian mother disowned Serbian son-in-law and so it went. Meanwhile, all I could do was stay glued to the TV back in the US and sink deeper in a sense of hopelessness.

Finally, one night I began channeling these deep feelings into a wordless melody. Then little by little I added words.... *Can you hear....? Can you feel......?* I started with these feelings - sensations that the children struggling to live in this difficult time might be feeling. Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian children all felt the same feelings of confusion and sadness and it was for them that I was writing this song.

I took a long night to finish the song and I sang it for my wife and family, but that was about it. I put it away for awhile never thinking to sing it publicly. (Being primarily an instrumental composer - I rarely sang in concert. Then one night, as I struggled to fill a 2-hour concert, I
decided to sing "Prayer of the Children." It was in Abravanel Hall at a private concert for Folio Corporation. (I'm not sure, but I think it was 1994.) The song had an immediate reaction on those in attendance and I was surprised at the almost hushed sound as I sang.

I performed the song a cappella with a vocal synthesizer called the Digitech Vocalist - a vocoder that digitally split my voice into 5 distinct parts. (This is done via MIDI.) The sound makes me sound a bit like a hip Gregorian choir and lends a sacred sound to the song. To this day I usually perform the song this way.

Eventually the song was recorded and made its way on to a CD produced by Randy and Brian Blosil for the Wordperfect Corporation entitled "Innovators." This CD was disseminated worldwide to over 500,000 Wordperfect 6.0 users. This aided in large part to people becoming familiar with the song.

Someone heard the song in Pullayup, Washington and got it into the hands of Andrea Klause who felt it would work perfectly as an vocal arrangement for children's choir. Already a talented arranger with many titles to her credit, she worked with me on a version that would soon be the de facto SSA arrangement of the song. This made its way throughout the Northwest (thanks to many choir directors and their Xerox machines. Aargh!). Eventually renowned choir director Weston Noble heard the piece and began performing it with his Luther College Nordic Choir. It was now becoming know throughout the midwest.

As Mr. Noble would participate as a guest adjudicator and conductor of high school honor choirs throughout the nation, he almost always sang "Prayer." Because of this, the song exploded across the country to where now - over 500 choirs have sung the song in high schools, community choirs, and professional chorales across the country. It has even been sung in many countries incoluding: Australia, Sweden, Mexico, German, among others.

The song has also been recorded (at last count) by over 100 choirs and used for such special occasions as the annual 9/11 commemoration, a yearly memorial service for the Columbine High School tragedy, and a concert in memory of the Oklahoma City bombing. These philanthropic uses of my song are the most meaningful to me because it was out of a spirit of desperation and frustration that the song was born. The fact that the song is used to console others in similar circumstanes is how the song should be used.

Can you hear the prayer of the children?
On bended knee, in the shadow of an unknown room
Empty eyes with no more tears to cry
Turning heavenward toward the light

Crying Jesus*, help me
To see the morning light—of one more day
But if I should die before I wake,
I pray my soul to take

Can you feel the hearts of the children?
Aching for home, for something of their very own
Reaching hands, with nothing to hold on to,
But hope for a better day a better day

Crying Jesus*, help me
To feel the love again in my own land
But if unknown roads lead away from home,
Give me loving arms, away from harm

Can you hear the voice of the children?
Softly pleading for silence in a shattered world?
Angry guns preach a gospel full of hate,
Blood of the innocent on their hands

Crying Jesus*, help me
To feel the sun again upon my face,
For when darkness clears I know you're near,
Bringing peace again

Dali cujete sve djecje molitive?
(Croatian translation:
'Can you hear all the children's prayers?')
Can you hear the prayer of the children?

(*note: Originally, the song was written with the lyrics “Crying Jesus…” Bestor now recommends substituting the words “Crying softly…” enabling people to subconsciously substitute “Jesus, Allah, Yahweh, etc.” This way, the song's universal message of love will be felt without any barriers or limitations.)

If anyone reading this blog knows of a choir or a recording featuring my song, I would love to hear from you. I'm trying to connect the dots where all the places it has been sung. Perhaps
this small offering of mine can be a catalyst for peaceful change in a very troubled world.

I'm thankful everyday for the still, small place where this song came from. I go there often and am always soothed.

**Kurt Bestor**

- Order sheet music of **SSA, TTBB, & SATB** versions of "Prayer of the Children"
- Download **solo vocal / piano version** of "Prayer of the Children"

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**About Me**

**Name:**
Kurt Bestor

**Location:**
Salt Lake City, Utah, United States

Born into a musical family in Waukesha Wisconsin, I found my place in the music world quickly performing piano and trumpet in school productions as early as 4th grade. After graduating from college in studio compostion, I started my professional career by arranging music for the Donny and Marie Show. Eventually, this early professional experience led to scoring films, recording CDs, performing concerts, arranging music for well-known singers, and composing original classical compositions. I live in Salt Lake City with my wife of 3 years, Petrina. I'm the father of two daughters, Kristin and Erika.

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