Daniel Gilliam
Take us back to the writing process a little. Why did you feel it was important to not use any traditional language when writing this mass? Using syllables and sounds, instead of words that we might recognize.

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Well, I have to also go back to my relationship with Kronos (Quartet), because the idea to write a mass came, the proposal came from David Harrington, who was invited with a group to participate at the sacred music festival in Quito, Ecuador. And he thought that writing a mass for the occasion would be a great thing. And I said, Yes, great, you know, I'm not culturally...it's not a part of my culture, and my upbringing; but of course, you know, I was brought up in western civilization and a form like that, that's also so old, and, and filled with meaning and musical meaning. So to find a way that would speak to me, and that I felt would be a work of art and not a liturgical piece of music, I realized it would have to be something that transcends the the Western idea of what the masses and the language that comes with it, but would have to be something that relates to the core of it, which is the celebration, and the invocation of the creative spirit, that is, in all of us and in, in everything that surrounds us.

Daniel Gilliam
It sounds like the work for you is a way of trying to describe in art, this interconnectedness that you talk about this sort of thing that transcends all of us and trying to replicate that somehow, through art and through music.

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Yes. And, you know, I really cannot say that it's always intentional. I think it comes from a personal experience and values, and my own view of the world that just comes through in the work even when I don't intend to do it. But if you would ask me to define my intention in being in this world, it would definitely be the intention of: yes, I want us all to feel, the respect and even all it's the existence of each of us in this life.

Daniel Gilliam
Some of the sounds, the choir makes are very playful. And they're almost funny. When they mimic the string players, if you sort of hear little children doing what children do, you know, having fun, was humor an intentional pursuit for you in this work?

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Well, I wouldn't say humor, but I would say openness and awareness of their age. I didn't mean to write things that were funny, but I wrote things that would bring out whatever they can bring, and humor and exuberance and playfulness are definitely a part of that.

Daniel Gilliam
In writing the piece, did you ever debate whether you should be using any language that we could understand or not, or it was always intended to be that way?

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Yeah, I didn't really think that language was important. Because the wider idea was how do we communicate without having any barriers? And the beauty of music is exactly that. It goes to places that we don't always control by our rational mind. And very often in vocal music, we do control things also, and perceive things with our rational mind because there is text so the idea to have vocal quality but but to avoid text was very appealing and no, I had I had no doubts while working on the piece that the only word that I wanted in the piece was "Holy," which came from Allen Ginsberg, which was also an homage to San Francisco and their whole view and life philosophy that I think is open and welcoming. And especially in "Howl," this is what we get. Yeah, whatever you see, wherever we look, there is something sacred to celebrate.

Daniel Gilliam
I think by not, and this is my own opinion, but I think by not using a words in the traditional sense, the singers and the string players; there's more of a unity of sound between the two groups, it doesn't feel like the string quartet is supporting the singers; but rather, everyone is unified in a common texture and a common sound. Was that intentional?

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Yes, that was intentional, and not only in this word, but in other words, I tend to treat musicians as one specific body of many individuals, so I don't treat them as separate groups or separate instruments, but I'm trying to think, what do they bring as a whole and how can they make colors and sonorities that are very specific to those various instruments or voices

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