

Unlike a good portion of the music he composed (but did not complete) during his sabbatical, Chichester Psalms is firmly rooted in tonality. Bernstein commented during a 1977 press conference, “I spent almost the whole year writing 12-tone music and even more experimental stuff. I was happy that all these new sounds were coming out: but after about six months of work I threw it all away. It just wasn’t my music; it wasn’t honest. The end result was the Chichester Psalms which is the most accessible, B-flat majorish tonal piece I’ve ever written.”

Chichester Psalms juxtaposes vocal part writing most commonly associated with church music (including homophony and imitation) with the Judaic liturgical tradition. Bernstein specifically called for the text to be sung in Hebrew (there is not even an English translation in the score), using the melodic and rhythmic contours of the Hebrew language to dictate mood and melodic character. By combining the Hebrew with Christian choral tradition, Bernstein was implicitly issuing a plea for peace in Israel during a turbulent time in the young country’s history. Each of the three movements of Chichester Psalms contains one complete Psalm plus excerpts from another paired Psalm. Musically, Bernstein achieved Dr. Hussey’s wish for the music to remain true to the composer’s own personal style. The piece is jazzy and contemporary, yet accessible. In a letter to Hussey, Bernstein characterized it as “popular in feeling,” with “an old-fashioned sweetness along with its more violent moments.”

Although Bernstein’s initial version was for full orchestra, the composer also created a adaptation for organ, harp, and percussion, which is the version we will present this morning.

The first movement begins with a triumphal introductory phrase with text from Psalm 108 (“Awake, psaltery and harp!”) that draws on the interval of a minor seventh (a significant musical motive that returns in the final movement, engendering a cyclical form). This dramatic introduction prompts a vigorous and bright, scherzo-like dance in 7/4 meter of Psalm 100 (“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord”). The number seven is an important number in Gematria (Hebrew numerology) and features prominently in the composition of the Chichester Psalms, both in the rhythmic structure and the harmonic/melodic language of the music.

A gentle and lyrical setting of Psalm 23 (“The Lord is my shepherd”) opens the second movement, featuring a countertenor soloist (eventually joined by soprano and alto voices) with harp accompaniment, a musical evocation of King David, the shepherd-psalmist.

The bitter expression and agitated music of Psalm 2 (“Why do the nations rage”) interrupts this tranquility. At this, the most dramatic moment of the composition, the setting prominently features music cut from West Side Story. Though the upper voices return with the soloist’s song of faith, the tension of suppressed violence lingers throughout the rest of the movement.

The third and final movement is the longest of the piece; its opening section features a more dissonant and rigorous compositional style than the others. With a fiery and elegiac introduction played by the organ, the music recalls the minor seventh motive from the first movement. In a moment

of consolation, the chaos is abruptly hushed for a simple, unsentimental presentation of Psalm 131 (“Lord, Lord, my heart is not haughty”), a rocking lullaby in 10/4.

Psalm 133 (“Behold how good”) comprises the coda material, predominantly in the style of a Lutheran chorale. It is significant for being the only moment in the entire composition for a cappella chorus, without instrumental accompaniment. Constructed from the work’s opening musical motive, the music and text combine in a visionary plea for reconciliation and unity throughout the world before concluding in a final Amen.

Chichester Psalms is tuneful, tonal and contemporary, featuring modal melodies and unusual meters. Through its use of motivic repetition, there is the sense of a hallowed rite. From the time of its sold-out world premiere at New York’s Philharmonic Hall on July 15, 1965 conducted by the composer himself, it was apparent that Bernstein had created a magically unique blend of Biblical Hebrew verse and Christian choral tradition: a musical depiction of the composer’s hope for brotherhood and peace.

~ Mark David Buckles and LeonardBernstein.com

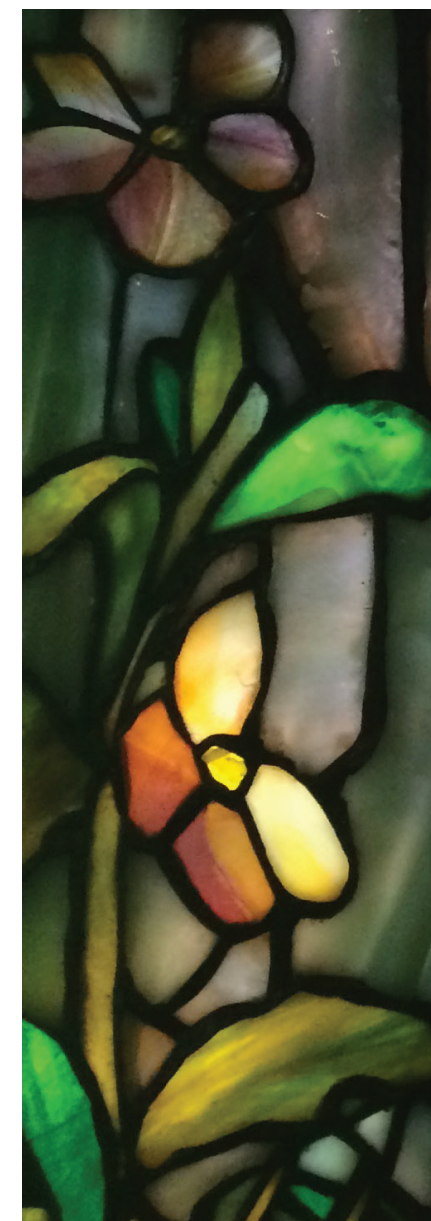


ARLINGTON STREET CHURCH

Unitarian Universalist

SUNDAY, APRIL 21ST, 2019

CHICHESTER PSALMS



Arlington Street Church
Boston, Massachusetts
Founded in 1729

Gathered in love and service for justice and peace

Arlington Street Church, *Unitarian Universalist*
351 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116-3303

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Phone: 617-536-7050 • Fax: 617-536-7051

E-mail: office@ASCBoston.org • Web: www.ASCBoston.org

Arlington Street Church, Unitarian Universalist

SUNDAY, APRIL 21ST, 2019

CHICHESTER PSALMS

Mark David Buckles, conductor

John Bitsas, countertenor

Kelly Lenahan, organ

Sam Schmetterer, percussion

Ting Sung, harp

The Arlington Street Church Choir

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

I. PSALM 108:2 & PSALM 100

PSALM 108:2

עוֹרָה, הַנְּבֵל וְכִנּוֹר; Urah, hanevel, v'chinor! Awake, psaltery and harp:
אֶעֱרָה שָׁחַר. A-irah shahar I will rouse the dawn!

PSALM 100

הַרְעִי עוֹלָה לַיהוָה, כָּל־הָאָרֶץ; הַרְעִי עוֹלָה לַיהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה; עֲבָדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה; בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי, בְּרִנָּה; דָּעוּ-- כִּי יְהוָה, הוּא אֱלֹהִים; --הוּא־עֲשֵׂנוּ, וְלֹא (וְלוֹ) אֲנַחְנוּ עָמוּ, וְצִאֵן מִרְעִיתוֹ; --בָּאוּ שְׁעָרָיו, בְּתוֹדָה; חֲצִרְתִּיו בַּתְּהִלָּה; הַדּוֹרֵלוּ, בְּרִכּוֹ שְׁמוֹ; כִּי־טוֹב יְהוָה, לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדוֹ; וְעַד־דּוֹר וָדוֹר, אֲמוֹנָתוֹ.
Hari'u l'Adonai Make a joyful noise
kol ha'arets. unto the Lord all
Iv'du et Adonai b'simha ye lands.
Bo'u l'fanav bir'nanah. Serve the Lord
D'u ki Adonai with gladness.
Hu Elohim. Come before his
Hu asanu v'lo anahnu. presence with singing.
Amo v'tson mar'ito. Know that the Lord,
Bo'u sh'arav b'todah, he is G*d.
Hatseirotav bit'hilah, He made us,
Hodu lo, bar'chu sh'mo. and we are his.
Ki tov Adonai, l'olam We are his people
has'do, and the sheep
V'ad dor vador of his pasture.
emunato. Come unto his gates
with thanksgiving
And into his court
with praise.
Be thankful unto him
and bless his name.
the Lord is good,
his mercy everlasting,
And his truth endureth
to all generations.

II. Psalm 23 & Psalm 2:1-4

PSALM 23

Countertenor "David" and
Choir sopranos and altos

יְהוָה רֹעִי, לֹא אֶחְסָר. The Lord
בְּנֹאֹת דָּשָׁא, יִרְבִּיצֵנִי; is my shepherd,
אֶל־מֵי מִנְחוֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי. I shall not want.
נִפְשִׁי יִשׁוּב; He maketh me to lie down
יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק, in green pastures,
לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ. He leadeth me
tsedek, beside the still waters,
L'ma'an sh'mo. He restoreth my soul,
He leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness,
For his name's sake.

Choir sopranos
and altos

גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ Yea, though I walk
בְּגִיא צְלָמוֹת, B'gei tsalmavet, Through the valley
לֹא־אִירָא רָע-- Lo ira ra, of the shadow of death,
כִּי־אֵתָה עִמָּדִי; Ki Atah imadi. I will fear no evil,
שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ, Shiv't'cha umishan'techa For Thou art with me.
הֵמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי. Hemah y'nahamuni. Thy rod and thy staff
They comfort me.

PSALM 2:1-4

Choir tenors and basses

לָמָּה, רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם; Why do
וְלְאֻמִּים, יִהְגְּרוּרִיק. the nations rage,
יִתְצַבּוּ, מַלְכֵי־אָרֶץ-- And the people
וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּרֵי־חַד; V'roznim nos'du yahad imagine a vain thing?
עַל־יְהוָה, וְעַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ. The kings of the earth
נִתְקָה, אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵימֹ; N'natkah et set themselves,
וְנִשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵימֹ. And the rulers
V'nashlichah mimenu take counsel together
אֹוֹתֵימֹ. Against the Lord and
Yoshev bashamayim against his anointed.
Yis'hak, Adonai Saying, let us break
Yil'ag lamo! their bands asunder,
And cast away
their cords from us.
He that sitteth
in the heavens
Shall laugh, and the Lord
Shall have them in derision!

PSALM 23

Choir sopranos and altos

תַּעֲרֵךְ לִפְנֵי, שְׁלֹחֹ-- Thou preparest a table
נֶגֶד צִרְרֵי; before me
דְּשֵׁנֶת בְּשִׁמּוֹן רֹאשִׁי, In the presence
כּוֹסֵי רִנָּה. roshi of my enemies,
Cosi r'vayah. Thou anointest my head
with oil,
My cup runneth over.

Countertenor solo

אֲךָ, טוֹב וְחֶסֶד Surely goodness
יִרְדּוּנֵי-- כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי; and mercy
וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה, Shall follow me all the
לֹאֲרֹךְ יְמֵיִם. Lorech yamim. days of my life,
And I will dwell in the
house of the Lord
Forever.

III. Psalm 131 & Psalm 133:1

PSALM 131

יְהוָה, Adonai, Adonai, Lord, Lord,
--לֹא־גִבָּה לְבִי Lo gavah libi, My heart is not haughty,
וְלֹא־רָמוּ עֵינַי; V'lo ramu einai, Nor mine eyes lofty,
וְלֹא־הִלַּחְתִּי V'lo hilachti Neither do I
בְּגִדְלוֹת וּבְנִפְלְאוֹת Big'dolot uv'niflaot exercise myself
מִמֶּנִּי. Mimeni. In great matters
אִם־לֹא שׁוִיטִי or in things
--וְדוֹמַמְתִּי Im lo shiviti Too wonderful for me
נִפְשִׁי: כְּגַמֹּל, עָלַי אָמוּ; Naf'shi k'gamul to understand.
כְּגַמֹּל עָלַי נִפְשִׁי. alei imo, Surely I have calmed
--יִחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל־יְהוָה; Kagamul alai naf'shi. And quieted myself,
מַעֲתָה, וְעַד־עוֹלָם. Ya el Yis'rael el Adonai As a child that is weaned
Me'atah v'ad olam. of their mother,
My soul is even
as a weaned child.
Let Israel hope
in the Lord
From henceforth
and forever.

PSALM 133:1

הִנֵּה מַה־טוֹב, Hineh mah tov, Behold how good,
--וּמַה־נְּעִים Umah na'im, And how pleasant it is,
שֶׁבֶת אַחִים For brethren to dwell
גַּם־יַחַד. Gam yahad Together in unity.

NOTES ON CHICHESTER PSALMS

In 1965, Leonard Bernstein took a sabbatical from his post as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic. Freed from the time-consuming obligations of conducting and studying scores, he could now turn his attention to composition. Reverend Walter Hussey, Dean of the Cathedral of Chichester in Sussex, England, had requested a piece for the Cathedral's 1965 music festival. Dr. Hussey was a noted champion of the arts, having commissioned works by visual artists, poets, and composers. Among these: an altarpiece painted by Graham Sutherland, stained glass windows by Marc Chagall, a sculpture depicting the Madonna and child by Henry Moore, a litany and anthem by W.H. Auden, and perhaps most notably, the cantata Rejoice in the Lamb by Benjamin Britten.

Bernstein responded with a "suite of Psalms, or selected verses from Psalms," under the working title, Psalms of Youth (Bernstein changed the title because it misleadingly suggested that the piece was easy to perform). Hussey was hoping that Bernstein would feel unrestrained for composing in a more popular vein despite the sacred nature of the assignment. Hussey wrote, "Many of us would be very delighted if there was a hint of West Side Story about the music."

Bernstein composed Chichester Psalms amid a busy schedule, completing his first work since the Third Symphony, Kaddish, in 1963, written in memory of President Kennedy. Both pieces combine choruses singing Hebrew text with orchestral forces, but where Kaddish is a statement of profound anguish and despair, Chichester Psalms is hopeful and life-affirming.

continued on back