

Cantata Singers

David Hoose, *music director*

Church of the Covenant, Boston

Wednesday, June 25 & Thursday, June 26, 2014, 7:30 p.m.

Psalm 90 for mixed chorus, organs, and bells (1923–1924)

Charles Ives
(1874–1954)

Lo Ira Ra for mixed chorus and instruments, based on ancient texts (2014)

Betty Olivero
(b. 1954)

First performance, commissioned by the AGO 2014 National Convention in Boston

Chichester Psalms (1965)

Leonard Bernstein
(1918–1990)

Psalm 108:2 & Psalm 100: Maestoso ma energico—Allegro molto—Dolce, tranquillo

Psalm 23 & Psalm 2:1–4: Andante con moto, ma tranquillo—Allegro feroce—Meno come prima

Psalm 131 & Psalm 133:1: Prelude—Sostenuto molto—Peacefully lowing—Lento possible

Organ prepared by Spencer Organ Company.

Program Sponsors

The commissioning of Betty Olivero's *Lo Ira Ra* was generously supported by an anonymous donor.

Program Notes

Charles Ives ignored the rules. As a young composer, he tried to follow European models, but didn't find them useful and quickly began to shed them. Even as a child, he fooled around with sounds that would have scared anyone. His experiments with intricate and complex rhythms, layers of seemingly unrelated music, and wildly dense harmonies became as possible and probable as any simpler utterance. Ives, more than any American composer delighted in turning musical evolution on its head.

Among Ives' more than forty compositions for chorus, his 1923–1924 setting of Psalm 90 stands tallest. The music's origins lay in his attempts to reconstruct a work lost about thirty years earlier, but the second version likely bears little resemblance to the original. In the later one, he beautifully integrates the traditional utterance of church anthems with innovative choral writing, and interaction that captures the drama, breadth, and fervency of the psalm. After completing the composition, Ives, an inveterate tinkerer, left the music untouched, telling his wife, Harmony, that he thought it his most perfect creation.

It may be. While not the craziest music he ever composed, Psalm 90 is nonetheless one of his most visionary works. The firmament—or God's infinity—is present in an unvarying organ pedal C from beginning to end. Above, the organ intones a succession of harmonies, each given its own signature: *The Eternities – Creation – God's wrath against sin – Prayer and Humility – Rejoicing in Beauty and Work*. These words are not sung, but simply imagined, and the harmonies with which they are associated presage the journey ahead. Although Ives never embraced a Christianity of exclusivity (“The soul is each man's share of God,” he wrote), this sequence does suggest his roots in Calvinist predestination.

Each verse in Psalm 90 associates with one or two of these opening harmonies; from that sequence, Ives builds a large, nearly symmetrical design. Tensions intensify toward the center, and at the mid-point, Verse 9, (“For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told”), the voices fan out from unison, always faster and louder, until at the peak of the wedge, they scream, “wrath!” From that terror they retreat, gradually slower and softer, to the unison they had left. On the far side of the fulcrum, the equilibrium shifts from human sin and God's anger to hope and humility, and then to quiet rejoicing. In the final, peace-filled verses, the bells of the white-steeped church and heaven's freedom surround in a comforting haze.

Ives composed no significant music after completing Psalm 90. One day in 1926, he came down from his study and, with tears on his face, said to Harmony, “I can't seem to compose any more. I try and try and nothing comes out right.” For thirty more years, he scribbled, revised old works, and fussed at himself and the world until he died in 1954.

Leonard Bernstein originally scored the *Chichester Psalms* for mixed chorus, boy soprano (or countertenor), three trumpets, three trombones, two harps, six percussionists, and string orchestra. He later re-scored the orchestral parts for organ, harp, and one percussionist, a very effective reduction, but for the highly compromised percussion part that, with six players, had formed an essential part of the original. Performers choosing the organ version often include more percussionists than the one, thus restoring a good deal of the work's color.

The same minister, Walter Hussy, of Chichester Cathedral, who had commissioned Benjamin Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* in 1943, was later responsible for commissioning the *Chichester Psalms*. The work was performed in July 1965, at the Southern Cathedrals' Festival, of which Hussy was dean, although the first performance had taken place earlier that month with Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic.

The composer Leonard Bernstein may have suffered from knowing and loving far too much music. So deep and broad was his familiarity with different genres and styles that it seemed he had absorbed all of it as if his own. In almost every piece he composed there is something—or a great deal—traceable to some other composer, whether it's Beethoven, Bruckner, Stravinsky, Mahler, or Gershwin. Sometimes Bernstein seems to be trying to turn off those voices, to forge a very personal language or design, but when he does, his music can seem sincere but somehow unpersuasive. When he doesn't fight the rich encyclopedia of his mind and his overflowing heart, his music is true, effective, and exquisite, like the vivacious ballet *Fancy Free*, the gripping music for the movie *On the Waterfront*, and the electric *West Side Story*. But all of these compositions are in a more “popular” vein; it's his “serious” works that seem to reveal an effort to turn off all that music in his head.

Chichester Psalms is the real thing. The music flows forthrightly and compellingly, captivating in its forthrightness, irresistible in its dynamic rhythms, and heartbreaking in its austerity—as long as the performers navigate that narrow

course between remove and indulgence. Even the soprano solo is simply endearing. *Chichester Psalms* has a unique strength, and it may be Bernstein's most successful non-theatrical music.

As it turns out, Bernstein based *Chichester Psalms* on material intended for *West Side Story*. Its roots—his own music and, by extension, others'—may explain something of the *Psalms*' effortless nature. His double thievery may sit at the music's power. After all, Handel said that good composers borrow, but great ones steal. When Bernstein stole unabashedly, he could be an honest, even great, composer.

– David Hoose

Betty Olivero has written a solemn, moving choral piece for SATB chorus and soloists, clarinet, accordion, piano, and harp, using a compilation of psalm verses of supplication. The title, *Lo Ira Ra*, is taken from Psalm 23 and translated as "I Will Fear No Evil." Each voice speaks in dialogue with the others in the style of Middle Eastern heterophony. There is essentially one melody that is played and sung differently by each voice in the composition, each voice inspired in part from the music rising from the swarming population of Jerusalem. The Psalms themselves are shared by a number of religions and in this piece the text and music reflect the reality of the music that is already shared.

Olivero writes of her compositional process and artistic goals:

I find the process of confronting and juxtaposing traditional, formal means with contemporary vocabulary to be highly challenging and of great curiosity. One of the most fundamental issues in my work, and the aim of my musical creation, is to use traditional, ethnic music materials in the compositional processes and thereby participate in the essence of oral tradition: transmission of essence, through evolution of expression; preservation and change. I do not seek these materials out of any scientific-musicological point of view. They serve purely as a dramatic stimulus and as a point of reference. Close scrutiny of these sources uncovers hidden, unpremeditated musical means, which invite further extension and development. These traditional melodies and texts undergo thorough transformation, so profound as to make their original forms, at times, unrecognizable, yet their spirit and highly-charged dramatic potential remain untouched. (www.olivero.co.il)

– Louise Munding

Charles Ives: Psalm 90

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place from one generation to another.
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.
Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, "Return, ye children of men."
For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.
Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.
In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.
For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.
Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.
For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.
The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
Who knoweth the pow'r of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.
So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.
Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.
O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.
Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.
And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Amen.

Betty Olivero: Lo Ira Ra

Yehi shalom bechelech; shalva, bearmenotaich.

Yebarech et amo beshalom

Beshalom yachdav.

Yehi shalom bechelech; shalva, bearmenotaich.

Lo ira ra

Bimei ra,

Et eini min dim'a,

Essa einai el heharim:

Elecha

Et eini min dim'a.

Aneni,

Velaila lelaila

Velaila velo dumia li.

Ki ta'aneni

Bekarii, aneni

Be'emunatcha aneni

Veyishtachavu lefanecha.

Va'ani berov chasdecha, avo beitecha;

eshtachave el hechal kodshecha, beyiratecha.

Ki ere'e shamecha,

Aneni

Va'aneni.

Chaneni,

refaeni

hoshi'eni.

Ki elecha, Adonai einai;

Elecha Adonai, nafshi essa.

Ve'ehemaya; vetitatef ruchi,

ve'al te'etar alai be'er piya.

Veha'er panecha,

Elecha Adonai, nafshi essa.

Nessa Alenu, or panecha Adonai.

Ve'al te'etar alai be'er piya.

Lo lanu Adonai, lo lanu:

Yavo'u veyishtachavu lefanecha,

va'ani berov chasdecha, avo betecha;

eshtachave el hechal kodshecha.

Peace be within thy walls; and prosperity, within thy palaces.

He will bless His people with peace

In peace.

Peace be within thy walls; and prosperity, within thy palaces.

I will fear no evil

in the days of evil,

mine eyes from tears,

I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains:

Unto Thee,

mine eyes from tears.

Answer me,

and night unto night

and at night, and there is no surcease for me.

For Thou wilt answer me,

Answer me, when I call,

answer me and in Thy righteousness

shall worship before Thee.

But as for me, in the abundance of Thy loving

kindness will I come into Thy house;

I will bow down toward Thy holy temple, in the fear of Thee.

When I behold Thy heavens,

Answer me

and answer me.

Be gracious unto me,

heal me,

save me.

For mine eyes are unto Thee, O God, the Lord;

Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

I must moan; when, my spirit fainteth,

and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

And cause Thy face to shine,

O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy

countenance upon us.

And let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

Not unto us O Lord, not unto us:

All nations shall come and prostrate themselves before

Thee,

but as for me, in the abundance of Thy loving

kindness will I come into Thy house;

I will bow down toward Thy holy temple.

Leonard Bernstein: Chichester Psalms

I

Urah, hanevel, v'chinor!
A-irah shahar!
Hariu l'Adonai kol haarets.
Iv'du et Adonai b'simcha.
Bo-u l'fanav bir'nanah.
D'u ki Adonai, Hu Elohim.
Hu asanu v'lo anachnu.
Amo v'tson mar'ito.
Bo-u sh'arav b'todah,
chatseivotav bit'hilah,
hodu lo, bar'chu sh'mo.
Ki tov Adonai, l'olam chas'do,
v'ad dor vador emunato.

II

Adonai ro-i, lo echsar.
Bin'ot deshe yarbitseini,
Al mei m'nuchot y'nahaleini,
Naf'shi y'shovev,
Yan'cheini b'ma'aglei tsedek,
L'ma'an sh'mo.
Gam ki eilech
b'gei tsalmavet,
lo ira ra,
ki Atah imadi.
Shiv't'cha umishan'techa
hemah y'nachamuni.

Lamah rag'shu goyim,
ul'umim yeh'gu rik?
Yit'yats'vu malchei erets,
v'roznim nos'du yachad
al Adonai v'al m'shicho.
N'natkah et mos'roteimo,
v'nashlichah mimenu avoteimo.
Yoshev bashamayim
yis'chak, Adonai
yil'ag lamo!

Ta'aroch l'fanai shulchan
neged tsor'rai,
Dishanta vashemen roshi,
cosi r'vayah.
Ach tov vahesed
yird'funi kol y'mei hayai
v'shav'ti b'veit Adonai
l'orech yamim.

I

Awake, psaltery and harp!
I will rouse the dawn!
Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the Lord, He is God.
It is He that has made us, and not we ourselves.
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
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

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters,
He restoreth my soul,
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness,
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for Thou art with me.
Thy rod and Thy staff
they comfort me.

Why do the nations rage,
and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together
against the Lord and against His anointed.
Saying let us break their bonds asunder,
and cast away their cords from us.
He that sitteth in the heavens
shall laugh, and the Lord
shall have them in derision!

Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of my enemies,
Thou anointest my head with oil,
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

III

Adonai, Adonai,
lo gavah libi,
v'lo ramu einai,
v'lo hilachti
big'dolot uv'niflaot
mimeni.

Im lo shiviti
v'domam'ti,
naf'shi k'gamul alei imo,
kagamul alai naf'shi.
Yahel Yis'rael el Adonai
me'atah v'ad olam.

Hineh mah tov,
umah na'im,
shevet achim
gam yachad.

III

Lord, Lord,
my heart is not haughty,
nor mine eyes lofty,
neither do I exercise myself
in great matters or in things
too wonderful for me to understand.
Surely I have calmed
and quieted myself,
as a child that is weaned of his mother,
my soul is even as a weaned child.
Let Israel hope in the Lord
from henceforth and forever.

Behold how good,
and how pleasant it is,
for brethren to dwell
together in unity.

