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A Conductor’s Guide to Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms* and an

Introduction to and Analysis of Leonard Bernstein’s *Missa brevis*

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A CONDUCTOR’S
GUIDE TO LEONARD BERNSTEIN’S
CHICHESTER PSALMS

and

AN INTRODUCTION TO AND ANALYSIS OF LEONARD BERNSTEIN’S
MISSA BREVIS

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Abstract:
This thesis examines two larger choral pieces by Leonard Bernstein, the *Chichester Psalms* and the *Missa brevis*, with the intention of helping conductors prepare and perform the works. The paper is written to aid choral professionals, whether they be university, college, or high school conductors, church musicians, symphonic chorus masters, or the music director of a professional ensemble. Included in the paper are: a discussion of the genesis and historical circumstances surrounding the composition of each work; an analysis of formal structures and key relationships for each movement; and suggestions for teaching and conducting the *Chichester Psalms*. In regard to the *Chichester Psalms*, the appropriate tempi, instrumentation, stage placement, and rehearsal techniques are discussed, as is the use of recordings by the composer as a study guide. The paper includes figures that illuminate the form of the individual movements of both works and give graphic representation to the written analysis. A selected bibliography and discography are included.
Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), “the most famous and successful native-born figure in the history of classical music in the USA,”¹ is the only major twentieth-century American composer to have written a choral-orchestral work that has entered into the canon of beloved and often performed works. Samuel Barber’s Prayers of Kierkegaard, though critically respected, is rarely performed. Aaron Copland’s popular Choruses from the Tender Land is excerpted from an opera. Time will tell if Morton Lauridsen’s hauntingly beautiful Lux Aeterna will still be programmed and played in forty years. But in his Chichester Psalms, Leonard Bernstein created a work that has been in the canon since its introduction, amid much fanfare, in 1965. It is a piece enjoyed by audiences, performers, and critics alike.²

According to Bernstein’s long-time publisher Boosey and Hawkes, there were ninety-five sanctioned performances of the orchestral version of Chichester Psalms in the Western Hemisphere in 2001, and ninety performances in 2002.³ But a true estimate of how popular the Chichester Psalms has become must also take into account the numerous (but uncounted) performances of the reduced version, scored for organ, percussion, and harp, as well as performances where the


³Eric Swanson, music librarian at Boosey and Hawkes, via telephone on June 22, 2003.
choir and soloists were accompanied by solo organ or piano. Taking these into account, it is easy to see how very popular the work has become since its unveiling in New York on July 15, 1965. (The official premiere took place at Chichester Cathedral in Sussex, England on July 31, 1965.)

What is it that has secured *Chichester Psalms* such a prominent place in the canon? Why do audiences enjoy the work as much as performers? And, most pertinent to this paper, what does a conductor coming to the piece for the first time need to know to bring it alive? The following three chapters will explore these questions.

All of Bernstein’s major works were written either on a commission or for a specific performance or occasion. The *Chichester Psalms* is no exception. The Very Reverend Walter Hussey, Dean of Chichester Cathedral, commissioned the work in honor of Dr. Cyril Solomon, a physician and personal friend of Bernstein’s, for a performance combining Chichester Cathedral “with its neighbours, Winchester and Salisbury, to produce a music festival.”

Hussey made several requests in his letter of commission. Due to space and cost limitations, Bernstein was asked to write for a reduced orchestra. (He obliged by scoring the work for strings, three trumpets, three trombones, two harps, timpani, and five percussionists; there are no woodwinds). According to Nick Jones:

> The composer’s selection of instruments is notable. Psaltery and other ancient plucked instruments are represented by a pair of harps. Old Testament brass instruments find a correspondence in modern trumpets and trombones, but horns and tuba are omitted. Interestingly, the entire woodwind section, some of whose instruments originated in the Middle East, is also omitted.

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4Leonard Bernstein, preface to *Chichester Psalms: Choral Score* (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1965), ii.
5Burton, 347-8.
6Nick Jones, liner notes to *William Walton’s Belshazzar’s Feast* and *Leonard Bernstein’s Chichester Psalms and Missa brevis: Robert Shaw, Conductor*, Telarc CD 80181.
Hussey also “added that ‘a hint of West Side Story’ in the new piece would be welcomed!” In company with other reasons to be explored in Chapter Three, this explains the rhythmically challenging, dance-like, percussion-heavy, second movement. The works have similar sounds, but by omitting the woodwinds, Bernstein ensured that the timbre of Chichester Psalms did not resemble too closely either a Broadway pit orchestra or a jazz band, the two most prevalent instrumentations in West Side Story.

The timing of Hussey’s commission was excellent, as Bernstein was granted a sabbatical in 1965 after his seventh year as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic. His stated musical goals for his fifteen months of leave were to write a new musical theater piece, to practice the piano, to restudy the Beethoven String Quartet Opus 132, and to “ponder the art of composition.”

In fulfilling his last goal, he devoted much of his time to studying the avant-garde compositional processes of the 1960s, an iconoclastic decade synonymous with political upheaval and war, amazing technological feats, and revolutionary social ideas (such as the black civil rights movement’s demands for equal treatment under the law, feminism, and gay and lesbian rights). Bernstein, about whom Tom Wolfe penned the famous article “Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s” for New York Magazine, was not unaware of the changing and unstable world around him. He was a proponent of the sexual revolution in all its guises, a fervent Zionist, an unrepentant political liberal, and even an accidental supporter

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8The new musical theater piece was to be based on Thornton Wilder’s The Skin of Our Teeth, with words by Bernstein’s longtime friends Betty Comden and Adolph Green. The project never came to fruition, but the sketches for several songs were incorporated into the Chichester Psalms.

Bernstein was in touch with his times. Though his conducting repertoire included all the major twentieth-century composers except the Second Viennese School, he was never a musical modernist as were his conducting teachers Serge Koussevitzky (his principal mentor), Dimitri Mitropoulis (the idol of his youth), or Artur Rodzinski (the first maestro to whom he was assigned to assist). Bernstein’s compositional style is more akin to the Americans David Diamond, Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber and, to a lesser degree, George Gershwin. When he went out on the town after New York Philharmonic concerts to unwind and play jazz, his improvisations sounded more like Benny Goodman than Miles Davis or Thelonious Monk. After much study of his contemporaries, he nonetheless chose to write Chichester Psalms in a stile antico of sorts; he was never successful with, or if truth be told particularly interested in, writing dodecaphonic music.

In a poem published in the New York Times reporting on how he had spent his sabbatical, Bernstein wrote:

For hours on end I brooded and mused
On materiae musicae, used and abused:
On aspects of unconventionality,
Over the death in our time of tonality,
Over the fads of Dada and Chance
The serial stricture, the dearth of romance

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10 The story of Felicia Bernstein’s fundraising party given in honor of the Black Panthers (at the family home in The Dakota), and Lenny’s “accidental support” of the revolutionary group is detailed in the Humphrey Burton biography, 389-93. “Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s,” a Tom Wolfe article that tarnished Bernstein’s reputation in certain circles for many years, is discussed fairly and completely by Burton.

11 Schiff, 447.

12 Joan Peyser, Bernstein, a Biography (New York: Beech Tree, 1987), 345.
“Perspectives in Music,” the new terminology,  
Psiosiomathematomusicology;  
Pieces called “Cycles” and “Sines” and “Parameters”—  
Titles too beat for these homely tetrameters;  
Pieces for nattering, clucking sopranos  
With squadrons of vibraphones, fleets of pianos  
Played with the forearms, the fists and the palms.13

Bernstein’s study of his contemporaries only served to make him more devoted to tonal music. He continued:

—And then I came up with the Chichester Psalms.  
These psalms are a simple and modest affair,  
Tonal and tuneful and somewhat square,  
Certain to sicken a stout John Cager  
With its tonics and triads in E-Flat Major.  
But there it stands—the result of my pondering,  
Two long months of avant-garde wandering—  
My youngest child, old-fashioned and sweet.  
And he stands on his own two tonal feet.14

Years later, Bernstein further elaborated on his sabbatical year:

In the course of that year I made many experiments because I had the luxury of a whole year to do nothing but experiment. And part of my experimentation was to try—it was the only time in my life I tried to write a specific kind of music—to try to write some pieces which, shall we say, were less old fashioned. And I wrote a lot of music, twelve-tone music and avant-garde music of various kinds, and a lot of it was very good, and I threw it all away. And what I came out with at the end of the year was a piece called Chichester Psalms, which is simple and tonal and tuneful and pure B flat as any piece you can think of. I don’t mean that it was all in B flat but I’m sure you get my point. Because that was what I honestly wished to write.15

13 Bernstein, Findings, 236-37.
14 Ibid.
15 Leonard Bernstein, cited in Peyser, 345.
Ultimately, Hussey was thrilled with the finished commission. And he “got more than a ‘hint of West Side Story.’” Humphrey Burton, in his biography on Bernstein, writes:

The male chorus’s dramatic intervention halfway through the second movement of the Chichester Psalms is a reworking of the chorus cut from the “Prologue” to West Side Story. Stephen Sondheim’s lyric “Mix—make a mess of ‘em! Make the sons of bitches pay” was transformed into “Lamah rag’shu goyim Ul’umim yeh’gu rik?” . . . Furthermore, the principal melodic material in all three movements of Chichester Psalms was adapted from music Bernstein had just composed for The Skin of Our Teeth.16 He had decided to set the psalm texts in the original Hebrew; by a combination of significant coincidence, minor miracle, and sheer good luck, he found appropriate texts to match the rhythms of Comden and Green’s Broadway-oriented lyrics. Thus the second half of the boy alto’s song—Psalm 23—in the second movement was originally set to

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Spring will come again} \\
\text{Summer then will follow:} \\
\text{Birds will come again} \\
\text{Nesting in the hollow,} \\
\text{Once again we’ll know all we know:} \\
\text{After the Winter comes Spring.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Bernstein should not be criticized for his decision to rescue material from the doomed Skin of Our Teeth project. Major composers borrow from themselves, and the lyricism that was distinctly Broadway in the 1960s works beautifully (thanks to Bernstein’s significant changes) as classical music.

16Hartmut Krones points out that the principal melodic material of the second movement of Chichester Psalms is derived from a setting of Psalm Two by Moshe Geynaman. Krones’s article in Die neue Musik in Amerika is a worthwhile read, although he fails to conclusively demonstrate the relationship between traditional music of the Ashkenazi tradition and Bernstein’s setting of the psalms.

17Burton, 348.
The Psalms and Bernstein’s Choice of Translation

Bernstein chose to set three psalms in their entirety and verses from three additional psalms for the work. Each of the commercially available scores prints the Hebrew transliteration of the psalms next to the King James translation in parallel columns placed immediately after the title page. It seems probable that Bernstein chose the text as written in the 1611 Authorized King James Version of the Bible because the work was written for an Anglican Choir and an English audience. It made sense for him to offer the poetic King James Version in both the published scores and in the program notes.

For ease of discussion, this paper will maintain continuity with the published score and use the King James translation.

The chart below indicates in which movement Bernstein uses each psalm text.

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From Which Edition Should We Perform?

When setting out to perform *Chichester Psalms*, the conductor first must decide from which edition of the work to perform. There are two versions available. The original scoring (see figure 2) includes: three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, two harps, strings, and a percussion battery that calls for five players. The second, more frequently performed version, is for organ, harp, and one percussionist. If the forces can be mustered, the full orchestral version (available by rental only) is well worth the effort for several reasons:

1. It is brilliantly orchestrated, and playable by a good collegiate orchestra (or even an outstanding high school orchestra, given enough rehearsal time). The twenty-minute work can easily be rehearsed by a competent contracted orchestra in two rehearsals.

2. Bernstein, a first-rate orchestrator, employs the timbres of the various instrumental groups imaginatively. Vigorous study of great composers is the finest composition teacher, and Bernstein—as a conductor and as a composer—was a dedicated student of the master orchestrators Maurice Ravel, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Dimiti Shostakovich. His recorded catalogue contains almost every published orchestral composition by these composers. Almost exactly halfway through his fifty-three year composing career in 1965, Bernstein was in full possession of his artistic powers.

3. *Chichester Psalms* is an immensely singable work that can be enjoyed by outstanding church choirs, community groups, and school ensembles, but it requires real commitment on the part of the choir to learn the piece. After all the preparation that goes into
teaching and learning it, it seems appropriate to perform it in the form that most fully shows the composer’s intention.

Unfortunately, many conductors do not have access either to solid players (through their school or church) or a large enough budget to hire professionals or semi-professional, community-level players to accompany the work. There may also be space limitations; even with Bernstein’s pared-down orchestra, a minimum of twenty-five players is required to perform the work.

Foreseeing such a problem—and undoubtedly prodded by his publisher—Bernstein arranged *Chichester Psalms* for organ, harp, and one percussionist in a purchasable edition that works beautifully as long as the conductor has an elegant organ and a fine organist at hand. The use of the condensed version also allows for a smaller choir; controlling the volume of one organ is considerably easier than balancing a vocal ensemble with an orchestra.

This paper discusses the work in reference to the full score. Even if a conductor is preparing the piece in the reduced version, it is helpful to know Bernstein’s original intentions in terms of orchestral color and timbre. The conductor’s understanding of the instrumentation is vital to help the organist create a fulfilling registration for the performance.

**Performances by the Conductor as a Guide to Interpretation**

In his book *The Grammar of Conducting*, Max Rudolph warns against conductors using recordings, citing “the risk of imprinting in one’s mind the interpretive ideas of another person or getting confused by listening to different versions.”19 This admonishment presents a significant quandary to the conductor who is studying the works of Bernstein. What if the composer whose piece you

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are bringing alive also happens to be one of the great conductors of the twentieth century? Many composers’ recordings do not represent what they wrote on the page. Aaron Copland and Benjamin Britten dabbled in conducting throughout their careers, but the recordings made under their batons, especially of their own works, are often disappointing (although both composers were fantastic pianists, and their recordings at the piano are a different story).

The conductor Leonard Bernstein is in an entirely different class. He has one of the largest commercially available catalogues of any classical musician for many reasons.\(^\text{18}\) He worked with first-rate orchestras, and his lifelong partnership with John McClure, one of the great recording engineers, ensured that the sound engineering was of the highest quality. Bernstein recorded hundreds of works with the New York Philharmonic, Weimar Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, and Israel Philharmonic, and his name continues to carry greater recognition than any other American conductor. To this day, he remains the only director to have led the New York Philharmonic in over 1,000 performances. Bernstein made two recordings of *Chichester Psalms* that are still available on compact disc, one with the New York Philharmonic and one with the Vienna Philharmonic.\(^\text{19}\)

It would be unwise for any conductor studying the *Chichester Psalms* to ignore Bernstein’s recorded interpretations because they show several important variances from the score—most significantly of *tempi* in all movements and of *rubato* in the second and third. Although his two available recordings were made twelve years apart, the timings of the first and second movements are exactly the same: three minutes, thirty-three seconds and five minutes, thirty-six seconds,

\(^{18}\)Myers, 232.

\(^{19}\)See discography.
respectively. Certainly, one cannot discount the composer’s choice to increase significantly the \textit{tempi} from the published metronome markings in the first movement, and to slow the opening and closing sections of the second movement even more dramatically. Bernstein’s recordings also demonstrate the blazing fire that was his particular brand of classical music making. \textit{Chichester Psalms} has been recorded by English church choirs and by other American conductors, but none match Bernstein’s commitment to rhythmic intensity, musical line, and artistic continuity.

Finally, Bernstein’s recordings demonstrate excellent Hebrew diction (he was a fluent speaker), which can assist a conductor untrained in the phonemes of the language. The published choral score, the full conductor’s score, and the organ part all contain an excellent pronunciation guide to Hebrew. With a little well-spent preparation time—including listening to Bernstein’s recordings of the work—anyone adept at diction can learn to pronounce the Hebrew language in its modern form as transliterated by the composer.
While lecturing on score study and music literature, Dr. Elmer Thomas said that there are three ways to know a piece of music:¹

1. Know that it exists, either by having read about it, or having heard of it.
2. Know how it goes, by reading the score, by listening to it, or by preparing it for rehearsal.
3. Know it intimately through performance—either as a conductor or as a perform er.

Most conductors have heard of the Chichester Psalms, as the work is immensely popular. So when they set out to learn the work, they generally start at Dr. Thomas’s second tier of knowledge; that is, they begin to learn “how it goes” by studying and marking the score, by playing through it at the piano, and by listening to recorded performances by great conductors, ideally with professional choirs and orchestras.

As a conductor, Bernstein was a meticulous score marker, a thorough student, and a consummate analyst. He would hold onto his score until the last nanosecond before a performance, only giving it to the librarian in time for it to

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¹Elmer Thomas, “A Lecture on Score Study and Literature,” February 8, 1988, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.
be placed on his music stand. He edited his own compositions just as meticulously. But a musical score—including the composer’s editorial markings—is, by definition, not the analysis of a work. It is a blueprint from which to analyze and recreate the piece. In learning and marking a score, conductors generally begin by intellectualizing the form.

The first movement of the *Chichester Psalms* is a simple, modified song form, as shown below:

![Figure 1: Form of Movement One](image)

The work begins with a ten-measure introduction announced by the crashing anacrusis of a B-flat major-major seventh chord in the brass, cymbals, chimes, and timpani, followed on the downbeat of the first full measure by *tutti* strings, harp, and choir. In figure 2 below, we see immediately the oscillation between the brass and percussion, on the one hand, and the choir, strings, and glockenspiel on the other, that continues throughout the introduction.
Figure 2: Chichester Psalms, Opening
(Continued on next page)
Figure 2: Chichester Psalms, Opening
(Concluded)
The opening is text driven; the words dictate the rhythmic value of each note. Bernstein’s written tempo marking is 60 to the quarter note, but in both of his recorded performances his tempo was faster than written (c. 68 to the quarter note).

In Jack Gottleib’s liner notes to Bernstein’s 1977 recording of the work, the introduction is called a “Chorale.” The opening harkens back to the Jewish call to worship, a ritual blast on the shofar, but it nonetheless may be called chorale-like in that the opening figure will be repeated, a cappella, “lento possibile,” and transposed down a minor third, as the final six measures of the last movement. In that form, without the brass and percussion’s interjections, it could certainly sound like a Lutheran prayer—albeit in Hebrew, of course. The text of the opening is “Urah ha-nevel, v’chinor urah! A-irah shachar, shachar a-irah.” Look no further than the first and second phrases to see that Bernstein expects the women to “rouse the dawn” with two explosive minor sevenths.

One of the motivic threads that binds the work together is this interval of the seventh. As already noted, Bernstein opens the work with a major-major seventh chord, and the melody immediately introduces both a melodic seventh, and the lowered seventh of the B-flat Mixolydian scale. Throughout the work, the composer varies the different types of major and minor seventh chords, major, minor, and mixolydian scales, and melodic leaps of major and minor sevenths.

2 “Awake psaltery and harp: I will rouse the dawn.”

3 Although Chichester Psalms was originally written for a chorus of men and boys, the vast majority of performances are undertaken with women singing the soprano and alto parts. Consequently I shall refer to the upper voices as the women’s parts throughout this paper. Bernstein expected that the work would be performed in this manner; his only stipulation pertaining to gender is that the solo in the second movement be sung by either a boy alto or a countertenor, it “must not be sung by a woman.”

4 Krones points out that the opening owes much to the choral fanfare from Mahler’s 8th Symphony. The attentive listener cannot miss the resemblance.
The cautious conductor will make note of where and how Bernstein sets each interval; by mastering the different uses of the interval of the seventh, the choir will have a much easier time singing the work.

The principal difficulty in teaching the opening ten measures is the tenor line. The work opens with the tenors coming in on the major seventh of the tonic key of B-flat.

They can find their pitch in the pick-up in the second trombone (and on the downbeat, in the violas), but it is best that they learn to sing an A-natural against a B-flat before beginning to learn the actual line. Bernstein initiates each section of the introduction with the tenors either a half step, or a whole step away from everyone else (i.e., the melody) in the choir. It is imperative that the tenors hear their part against the unison women, as there is a tendency (in the weaker singers) for the pitch to migrate either up a half step (measures 1 and 7) or down a whole-step (measures 4 and 9).

Another difficulty in the opening pertains to balance. The composer has marked all parts *fortissimo*, but it is important to remember that in his mind’s ear the sound of the treble voices was the timbre and volume of a boy’s choir. Consequently he wrote for unison treble. With a standard, adult SATB ensemble the women voices—set in the strongest part of their range—are too loud if sung *fortissimo*. A beautiful, solid *forte* is sufficient sound, especially in the given ranges, to balance the men.

The tempo quadruples

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{at} & \quad \text{120} \ (C + \frac{3}{4})
\end{align*} \]

and the meter changes to a steady 7/4 at measure 11. Bernstein’s 7/4 is joyful and
exciting. It is always conducted in a three pattern (\(\text{-}\-\-\-\-\)), and the meter provides the movement with the infectious dance rhythm that pervades the next 106 measures. After a three-measure descending F Mixolydian interlude, shown in figure 3 below, the men enter with an eighteen-measure melody that forms the basis of the entire movement.

\textit{Figure 3: Three-Measure Transition to Main Theme}
It is no accident that it takes Bernstein’s melody eighteen measures to wind its way through the keys of B-flat, C, E, C, A major and minor, and back to B-flat. Eighteen is the luckiest number in Judaism; in the Sephardic tradition, it is the numerical value ascribed to life itself.\(^5\)

The graphic representation of the entire movement (Figure 1) shows that the main theme appears in its entirety three times in the work, at measures 4, 40, and 83. The first two times, it begins in the key of B-flat major, and the third time—during the orchestral interlude—in G major. The theme is a continuous spinning of a single melody. In this movement, and in the last movement, although not in the second, Bernstein’s text setting communicates the overall emotions of the psalms, rather than emphasizing individual words. In fact, there is not a clear relationship between the individual words and musical meaning; the conductor can be content to know the poetic translation of each line. Bernstein has set a catchy, rollicking, and unconventional, eighteen-measure melody over an incessant rhythm. It is distilled to its most basic form in Figure 4 below:

\(^{5}\)The symbol for eighteen in Judaic numerology is chai. This symbol is worn as a good luck charm by Jews the world over.
In terms of notes, rhythm, and intonation, the main body of the first movement of the work is the easiest section of the piece to learn; the choir will pick it up quickly. The eighteen-measure theme and its accompanying harmony look much more complicated on the page than they sound to the ear. The most prudent way to teach them is to have the choir sing significantly under tempo on numbers (in the manner of Robert Shaw: either one-two, one-two, one-two-ti, or one-two, one-two, ti-and-uh, etc.) so that the ensemble feels the 7/4 clearly, and together. For most church choirs, oratorio societies, large college groups, and high school ensembles, the melody, though modulatory and chromatic, will come quickly with the assistance of the piano and a few good sight-readers in the ensemble.

It is best to teach the first eighteen measures of the main theme in sum before going on to the next section, because learning the main theme, the Hebrew, the dynamics, and the articulation will make it much simpler to work through the
rest of the piece. Bernstein writes *ma molto marcato* for each of the men’s entrances, and then *marcato* for each of the women’s. He is certainly looking for unbridled energy and excitement, as well as the explosive diction of Hebrew consonants, which are much more aurally present and guttural than in English. The conductor should have the choir speak the text repeatedly in the 7/4 rhythm of the setting. It is also helpful to teach the singers to conduct in the lopsided three pattern required by the asymmetrical meter, as ingraining the rhythm into the singers’ bodies may release vocal tension that can result from the extended *tessitura* in the tenors and sopranos later in the movement.

The bridge, which begins at measure 32, and is reproduced in figure 5 below, is notable for the increased rhythmic excitement generated by the bass line and by the addition of accents over the downbeat of each vocal entrance in its first four measures. In both appearances of the bridge (measures 32 and 58) the musical material introduces a full orchestral and vocal *tutti* section.
Figure 5: First Three Measures of Bridge to con gioia
In measure 40, marked *con gioia*, Bernstein sets the main theme in unison octaves in the basses, altos, first violins, glockenspiel, and third trumpet. The tenors, sopranos, xylophone, violas, and celli are given a boisterously rhythmic countermelody that simultaneously outlines the harmony and supplies great rhythmic drive to the 7/4.

The melody and countermelody at measure 40 are accompanied by the same F mixolydian harmony as in their primary appearance. Consequently, the ensemble should have little difficulty in hearing the harmonic progression through this section. The easiest way to solidify the notes and rhythms in the second section is to have the tenors and sopranos sing their melody from measure 40 to measure 44 and then to ask the basses and altos to do the same. It is best not to have the choir sing the counter-melody at this point on numbers; the 7/4 has been firmly established, and the choir’s difficulty and ensuing frustration in attempting to articulate the numbers will outweigh any gain in improved ensemble. At this point in the learning process, the choir has already learned the words; it is better to sing the countermelody with the Hebrew. The basses and altos, of course, will have no problem, and rehearsal of the first four measures of the theme is not necessary.

Because of the high range of the tenor line in measures 46 and 47, shown below in figure 6, many conductors (including Shaw) judiciously add a few altos to warm the sound. But the homogenized sound that results when altos and tenors sing together is antithetical to the energy and raw excitement incipient in the line. That being said, this line is the most difficult to hear of any section in the body of the opening movement because of the oscillations between G-sharp and G-natural, and F-sharp and F-natural. Additionally, the line lies directly in the *passaggio* of the average tenor. The addition of altos may certainly be a grudging necessity
in weaker ensembles. The question of assigning a few altos to the line aside, if it is necessary in rehearsal to isolate the two measures, it is helpful to have the tenors sing them down an octave in order to avoid vocal exhaustion.

Figure 6: Difficult Tenor Line

The musical climax (C section in Figure 1) of the first movement begins at measure 65 (marked *boisterously* and *fff* in the voice parts)\(^6\) with the first *tutti* homophonic statement since the introduction. The harmony is intensely dramatic. The choir comes in on an eight-part C major triad that drops blatantly (and against all traditional rules of voice leading) to B major and then returns to a multi-octave, unison C. The composer transposes the sequence to E minor, then resolves it again to the unison C. The section is animated with a rhythmic drive reminiscent of Stravinsky’s *Le sacre du printemps* by the alternation of a tritone in the basses, celli, timpani, and third trombone. Bernstein extends the climax by adding two measures to the original eight, so that the phrase (with slight alteration in the second eight measures) equals eighteen measures (8+8+2).

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\(^6\) Bernstein, ever the polyglot, uses Italian and English musical terms, directions, and adjectives throughout the work. He clarifies Italian with English, and he chooses adverbs like warmly, boisterously, and tinny to connote color and timbre in the ears of conductor and singer alike.
The final eighteen-measure statement of the main theme—this time entirely orchestral—begins by dovetailing the last two measures of the climax with the reappearing main theme in the first violins, principal harp, and glockenspiel. The seamless transition from the open fifths in the choir (which can be devilishly difficult to tune) allows the melody simply to come out of thin air. Bernstein’s wonderful use of orchestral color is evident as the theme is passed from violins and glockenspiel to trumpet and harp and back again.

The coda of the movement is seventeen measures long and begins with eight measures of the vocal solo quartet that follows the orchestral interlude. The coda serves two purposes: it provides a transition back to the full choir over a long sub-mediant buildup in the celli and basses, and it personalizes the movement by allowing individual voices to proclaim the last two lines of Psalm 100: “Ki tov Adonai, L’olam has’do, V’ad dor vador emunato.” When the choir returns for the final statement, which is the same melody as the opening theme of the work transposed up a fourth, the recapitulation is hidden by a two-measure staggering of the sopranos and tenors against the altos and basses. The fermata in the third to the last measure, shown in figure 7, below is to be regarded as an extra measure of crescendo in the percussion, at least according to recordings by Bernstein and Shaw. By asking all other parts to rest or breathe on the last dotted half note (fifth, sixth and seventh beat) of an imaginary added measure, ensemble clarity is maintained, and the movement draws to a most satisfactory conclusion.

7“For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth to all generations.”
Figure 7: Fermata in Measure 115
CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING:
CHICHESTER PSALMS, MOVEMENT TWO

I believe in art for the warmth and love it carries within it, even if it be the lightest entertainment, or the bitterest satire, or the most shattering tragedy. For if art is cold it cannot communicate anything to anybody.

Leonard Bernstein, *Findings*

After deciding to bring a work of art to life, a performing artist must chose or discover a framework from which to analyze it within the context of when and why it was created, how it stands in relation to history, and—if the piece lies within the genres of music, theater, dance, or performance art—how best to comprehend its written notation, so that it can be satisfactorily recreated. In vocal music, conductors and singers most often start with the text, because they imagine that it is the text that gave impetus in the composer’s mind to the musical work. Alternatively, they look at the harmony or musical language first, especially if it seems as though the text is either secondary or simply a medium by which to create sound.

The second movement of the *Chichester Psalms* may be seen as a short, dramatic scene, replete with solo, women’s and men’s ensembles, full chorus, and sensational accompaniment. Bernstein’s assemblage of the two aforementioned incongruent Psalms\(^1\) with the reworking of a deleted scene from *West Side Story*

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\(^1\)Bernstein chooses to set Psalm 23 in its entirety, while he uses only the first four verses of the Psalm 2.
creates a movement whose immediacy transcends even the famous biblical texts from which the composer ultimately gleaned his inspiration.

Bernstein, like his compositional forefathers who wrote opera or music theater in addition to concert music, had a profound gift for imbuing his works with drama. Only the *Jeremiah Symphony* and the “Quintet” from *West Side Story* approximate the combination of irony, raw rhythmic energy, and profound sadness that he creates by juxtaposing two of the most disparate psalms in the Bible in the second movement of *Chichester Psalms*.

The movement begins with a boy tenor or countertenor singing the Psalm 23 simply, with a basic plucked accompaniment of two harps. A swath of Middle Eastern color is added through the addition of a triangle and a suspended cymbal struck with timpani sticks. The harps provide a constant, noble *pastorale* while the young boy (or countertenor singing in *falsetto*) intones the Psalm’s sentiment with a long, legato melody alternating between cadences in A major and A minor. The opening is reproduced below in figure 8:
Figure 8: Opening of Movement Two
The key, which is a half step down (or, more appropriate to Bernstein’s overall concept of key scheme, a major seventh up) from the B-flat major of the first movement, is obscured because the opening chord is a second-inversion triad with no third and an added tritone D-sharp. In fact, the composer alternates between A major and A minor throughout the first section of this ABA movement. The form of the movement can be distilled, as shown in figure 9:

![Figure 9: Form of Movement Two](image)

The boy’s solo melody is an asymmetrical aria that covers, by steps and leaps, the range of a ninth. Bernstein once again gives prose directions of Mahlerian proportions at the beginning of the movement. The opening seventeen measures are marked Andante con moto, ma tranquillo, but the soloist is given additional directions to sing “semplice senza crescendo o diminuendo (non-sentimentally).” The composer’s directions suggest that the soloist represents a young boy strumming his instrument and singing words that he has either known for a long time or perhaps was idly improvising without really paying attention to what he was singing about. The playfulness of the alternation between major and minor cadential endings, and the addition of the triplet rhythm in measure 28 further suggest improvisation, as do the pick-up notes as an impetus for every phrase after the second.
More than the written score, Bernstein’s recordings suggest that David is improvising. The composer creates significant breathing room in the phrases; he takes liberty with *rubato* in measures 10 and 16, and the *poco ritard* before measure 31 can hardly be called “*poco*.” The *rubato* in this section is not a momentary passion, or an in-the-moment abatement of musical good taste; he performs it the same way on both recordings. It speaks not only of Bernstein’s propensity to change what composers, including himself, had written, but also it illuminates the *cantabile* nature of the opening. The score works well, but his recorded performance is better, and more musical.

After the boy’s solo, the strings enter at measure 31 for the first time; they are followed one measure later by divided sopranos, singing a canon at the unison with a one-measure, staggered entrance. Bernstein probably chose to split the sopranos into two parts instead of assigning the canon to the sopranos and the altos because of the E in the melodic line in measure 39. The alto color would overpower the sopranos if they were given that line. For this reason, conductors are cautioned against assigning one of the lines to the sopranos and one to the altos. If the soprano section is not big enough to handle the *divisi* alone, the sopranos and altos should be divided evenly between the two lines.

The entrance of the canon at measure 32 and the accompanying tempo change serve both to echo the solo melody and to enforce the text declamation, and therefore the dramatic action, of the psalm. Bernstein’s changes of tempo throughout all three movements are obligatory. Even when he performed the work at *tempi* significantly different from the ones he notated in the score, he retained

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2Certainly the most famous of these was Bernstein’s decision to change the German word for joy (Freude) to freedom (Freiheit) in his performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony at the celebration of the destruction of the Berlin wall on Christmas Day, 1989 (See Burton, 509).
consistent tempo relationships between the given sections.

The soloist returns at measure 55, repeating the final seven measures of his original melody and reiterating “Adonai roi, Adonai roi, lo ehsar!” The women reply with a single “Adonai roi, lo ehsar!” before they are interrupted on the downbeat of measure 64 with the explosion of the Allegro feroce (or B section, see figure 4). It is noteworthy that neither of Bernstein’s recordings heed his marking of “non ritard” in measure 63. In fact, in both recorded performances he takes significant rubato to set up the new tempo and extreme dynamics of the B section, shown below in Figure 10:

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3“The Lord is my Shepherd, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

4Compare Shaw’s recording of this movement (Telarc CD 80181), which stays true in most ways to the written score, with either of the two composer-conducted performances in the Bernstein discography.
Figure 10: Allegro feroce, B Section of Movement Two
The men’s chorus that sings so fiercely and rhythmically from measure 64 until the key change and re-entrance of the women in measure 102 (and beyond as part of a gender clash of sorts) may be viewed as representing any of three things: soldiers angry about their lot as pawns in their masters’ games; the voice of the Lord himself, furious and derisive of man’s vanity; or a sudden shift in thought in the mind of the childlike David from a lovely vision of the Lord as shepherd to an angry image of the nations raging furiously together as the people imagine vain things. The music clearly originates from the text, and begs an answer to the repeated question, “Why do the nations rage?” The explosive nature of the percussion requires an entirely different concept of singing as voiced drama. The men must be taught to sing forcefully, gutturally, and with great fervor.

These fifty-six measures represent the most difficult section in the entire work for the choir, and they require special attention from the conductor, from the first read-through until the final performance. Even conductors who do not generally memorize their music should seriously consider committing measures 64-120 to memory. In addition, the conductor must have command of the Hebrew diction in this section, or it will be incredibly difficult to teach the words to the ensemble. It is rare that a men’s chorus is totally secure in either the B section or the amalgam of A and B that forms the subsequent C section. The payoff however is that once the individual singers learn the Allegro feroce, it stays with them forever. Men who have not sung the Chichester Psalms in twenty years readily recall phrases like “Lamah rag’shu goyim, Ul’umim yeh’gu rik” because, they were forced—by hook or by crook—to memorize them. No matter how much ensemble rehearsal time is slated for preparation, every conductor who deigns to lead the piece must understand that their men will be required to do some homework
on this section. The words must be memorized by the ensemble, and that memo-
risation ultimately must take place either at home or in the practice room.

The difficulty with learning the men’s chorus part is simple—there are
many Hebrew words, sung at a very fast tempo, with frequent syncopated
entrances, spanning the range of two octaves at a great variance of dynamic lev-
els. All the techniques of good choral teaching should be employed in helping the
men come to terms with what one conductor called “fifty-four measures of
chorophonous hell.”5 Time must be allotted, either in a sectional situation or at
the beginning or end of a rehearsal, as there is no reason for the women to be pre-
sent while the men “woodshed” such a tricky section. The men should learn to
speak the section in rhythm first, without notes. It is helpful to have them physi-
calize a steady beat (starting significantly under tempo) while rapping the words
as Bernstein set them. Once they can do this, the conductor should teach them to
speak while they conduct a simple two pattern, and then, at measure 98, a three
pattern. It is imperative that the men pay particular attention to Bernstein’s articu-
lation markings; the entire section is to be sung staccato and marcato. Depending
on the level of musicianship of the group, the dynamic markings should also be
incorporated at this early stage. It is much more difficult to add them in later.

The tonal structure (A minor—C minor—A minor) of the section is simple
to audiate, and once the men have learned the words and rhythm, it is not difficult
with aid of the piano to sing the Hebrew on the notated pitches. At some point the
singers will “get it,” and they will come to enjoy this section immensely. The
jazzy, raucous rhythms are infectious, and the combination of ensemble work and
private practice results in an emotional attachment to the section.

5William D. Hall, rehearsal of the Chapman College Chamber Singers, May 4, 1987,
Chapman College.
Bernstein’s written dynamics for the orchestra heighten the drama and add color to the *colla voce* accompaniment. From the *subito pianissimo* at measure 66, the xylophone must play a true *pianissimo* as it is written. Even the greatest conductors have experienced significant balance problems as a result of the zeal of the mallet players in this section, as demonstrated by Shaw’s recording. Additionally, the conductor must ask all five percussionists to play the entire B section *secco*, so that the *staccato* words in the men’s parts will not be lost to residual percussion.

The remainder of the accompaniment, although relatively high for the principal trumpet and rhythmically challenging for all instruments, can be learned by a professionally contracted orchestra in two rehearsals. High school-and university-level orchestras will naturally need more time, depending on the level and experience of the ensemble. The conductor should keep the beat compact, simple, and clear, and insist that the players count and come in with minimal gesture and cueing. A conductor might even say to the instrumental ensemble, “This is one of the scariest places in the choral repertoire for the men’s section. I will not be paying much attention to the orchestra in the performance for these fifty-six measures. Good luck, and don’t get lost.”

Bernstein shows his knack for thematic unification at measure 102, *L’istesso tempo*. After resting for thirty-three measures, the women return with the opening theme, again presented canonically, and shown below as figure 11:
Figure 11: Return of the Opening Theme of Movement Two
For the recapitulation the sopranos and the altos each have their own line, beginning with the Hebrew “Ta’aroche l’ fanai shulchan Negred tsor’rai.”\(^6\) The juxtaposition of their gorgeous melody—the women singing words of gratitude and faith against the men’s interjections of the “Lamah rag’shu”\(^7\) theme in a disjunct, chanted, broken manner, reminiscent of the dispersing of military ranks in the throws of a heated battle—represents the finest and most passionate word painting of the work. The terrible beauty of this section can only be brought to the surface if great attention is paid to the vast dynamic contrasts. As with so much of the work, the orchestra often plays *colla voce* in this section. The male voices should predominate, but the color—especially in the percussive interjections—must be that of a military entanglement. The B section ends with the women repeating, three times, “*Cosi r’vayah.*”\(^8\).

Following a three-measure *morendo* in all parts, and a one-measure *rallentando* (which Bernstein, in his recordings, treats as a fermata over the downbeat of measure 119) the boy soloist returns with the final stanza of Psalm 23. Although in the opening of the movement the composer asks that the soloist sing without sentimentality, at its conclusion he writes that it be sung “*dolcissimo.*” The boy is accompanied for the first eight measures by the full brass (played *dolce* and *pianissimo*) in a lovely, weeping motive that outlines the harmony via descending triads played in unison with the harp. Bernstein accompanies the boy during the second seven measures with muted strings and trumpet alternating with trombone on a long pedal tone on the tonic A. The women return once again

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\(^6\)“Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies."

\(^7\)“Why do the nations rage?”

\(^8\)“My cup runneth over.”
to sing “Adonai roi, lo ehsar,”\textsuperscript{9} and the movement ends firmly in A minor with
an asymmetrical, eleven-measure coda that harkens back to the “Lamah rag’shu” theme, played \textit{misterioso} in alternating trumpet, xylophone, second harp, viola,
and celli. The eerie \textit{pianissimo} of the final measures is broken with a violent
stinger on the anacrusis of the last measure in the bass drum, harp, and low
strings. The conductor must be insistent that the final notes on the bass drum be
played \textit{only} forte; the tendency will be for the drummer to hit the \textit{gran cassia}
with all his might, which obscures the final slap pizzicato in the basses and celli
and lends an inelegant finish to an otherwise thoughtful, personal statement about
the relationship of man to two of the greatest forces to make themselves known
to human existence—one of this world and one of the spiritual—namely, war and
God.

\textsuperscript{9}“The Lord is my Shepherd.”
The last movement begins by recapping several of the major melodic themes (or motives) that have previously appeared in the work. During the opening nineteen-measure section of the final movement, marked “Prelude,” and partially shown in figure 12 below, Bernstein exploits an orchestral timbre not yet heard: a string orchestra, with harp and trumpet *obbligato*.

*Figure 12: First Half of the Prelude, Movement Three (Continued on next page)*
The principal melody, which is presented by the first violins, is identical to the women’s opening phrase of the first movement, only transposed up a whole step and accompanied by a C minor modality, instead of the original B-flat major. It is harmonized by fierce chromaticism in the second violins, violas, and celli. (The basses are tacet until needed for an accompaniment to the trumpet and harp obbligato at Adagio, measure 10).

Bernstein quotes the opening motive five times in the Prelude. In doing so, he ties all three movements of the Chichester Psalms together, and he creates one-half of a set of bookends for this particular movement. The opening theme,
set in the first movement to “Urah, hanevel, v’chinor!,”¹ will become “Hineh mah tov umah nayim”² in the postlude of the third movement. The form of the Prelude is shown in figure 13:

![Figure 13: Form of Prelude, Movement Three](image)

Although the Prelude sounds particularly chromatic, the key areas of C minor and A minor are clearly established. In the first statement, we hear the tonic C as the principal note of the opening theme. In the B section, the harmony is firmly established as A minor, so that a sub-mediant relationship may be clearly understood. It also calls forth a tonal memory of the second movement, which is in the same key.

After three statements of the opening theme (interspersed with material that foreshadows the principal theme of the upcoming body of the movement), the composer employs a short, hauntingly beautiful, two-chord accompaniment for the brief return of the secondary theme from the A section of the second movement (measures 10 and 11). The melody, played in unison by a single muted trumpet and the harp in harmonics, is abruptly interrupted in measure 12 by

¹“Awake, psaltery and harp!”

²“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is.”
another interjection of the opening theme, marked *subito agitato, fortissimo*, and articulated with accents on top of each note. After this fifth and final presentation of the theme (this time with alteration of the intervallic relationships of the last two notes, but still fully recognizable as the theme), the composer brings back the basses to sustain a pedal tone A under changing chords in the inner string voices and a beautiful ascending chromatic melody in the first violins. The progression, which is shown in figure 14 below, takes the ear on a four-measure journey towards a B major triad over the pedal A bass, ending with the violas holding the added—and pivotal—B-natural as the harmony resolves to the G major of the body of the movement.
Figure 14: Second Half of the Prelude, Movement Three
The effect of these last four measures of the Prelude is sublime—the first violins outline, by way of a long, floating melody, the notes of D, E, F, and F sharp, landing on the fifth of the B major triad, which can be analyzed as either B major over an A bass, or as an A major sharp 11 chord. This functions as the borrowed dominant from the upcoming main key of G major. In his recordings, Bernstein takes the first three measures in tempo, but with great expression, and allows the sound of the outer voices to completely fade away in the final measure, maintaining only the sound of the violas’ B to sound, as the harp and timpani enter for the five-beat introduction to the men’s entrance.

The influence of the great tradition of music for string orchestra—especially Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings, the third movement of Britten’s Simple Symphony, and Barber’s Adagio for Strings—can be felt throughout the Prelude. It must be played passionately, with a warm, full, vibrated sound. The final emotional effect of the string Prelude should be that of the quieting of a distressed heart through faith. The young psalmist runs through the desert, desolate and angry, looking for solace, and finds it at the banks of the River Jordan. The tension is relieved as the key resolves, the tempo changes, and the harp begins a comforting ostinato after the chromaticism of the previous section.

Bernstein chooses to set the main body of the third movement in 10/4, with directions that it should be conducted and felt 2+3/4 and 2+3/4, in a divided four pattern. The harp maintains the metronomic obbligato by alternating intervals of a sixth through the first five measures.

One possible reason for Bernstein’s decision to compose in 10/4 is that the opening phrase of the first movement, “Urah, hanevel, v’chinor! Urah!,” in

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3Leonard Bernstein, Chichester Psalms, 58.
4“Awake psaltry and harp, awake!”
which he chooses to repeat the verb “Urah” has ten syllables. The first five notes of the opening theme makes up the melodic fragment that is used five times in the Prelude of the third movement. (figure 12) Similarly, the final postlude prayer (figure 17), “Hineh mah tov, u’may nayim, shevet achim gam yachad,” has fifteen syllables, all of them set to the same melody that we hear at the very opening. At some level, either consciously or subconsciously, the composer chose to set his text and melody on a rhythmic base five. If he had simply set the text of Psalm 131 to its natural rhythm, he would have alternated between 7/4 and 11/4, following the poetic flow of the Hebrew words. Instead, he chose a meter that requires some alteration from the natural word stress. The 10/4 meter allows for a gentle rocking motion that ties in the aforementioned rhythmic themes, and makes wonderful allusion to the central line from Psalm 131, “Im lo shiviti v’dom’ti, Naf’shi k’gamul alei imo, Kagamul alai naf’shi.”

The overall form of the third movement (including the Prelude) is shown in Figure 15:

**Figure 15: Form of Movement Three**

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

6“Surely I have calmed and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child.”
The main body of the movement begins with the aforementioned five-note harp introduction to the men’s melody, beginning on the text “Adonai, Adonai.” It is shown in figure 16:

**Figure 16: Main Body of the Third Movement**
Singing in unison, the tenors and basses have a graceful, serpentine line that winds its way around the interval of an octave by way of interspersed whole and half-steps, as well as leaps of thirds, fourths, and fifths and in the second part of the phrase, a jump of a sixth. The melody modulates through a series of simple harmonic changes toward a brief foray into F-sharp major, but before the women’s entrance a stunning three-part sequence in the strings brings the harmony back toward the tonic key for the duet that makes up the next nine measures.

The predominant texture in the main section of the third movement is that of choir, strings, and harp. The brass plays in eleven of the thirty-seven measures that make up the body of the movement, but in those measures, they are always con sordino and either pianissimo or pppp. At each entrance, they either double the choir or serve to color the sound of the strings and voices. The percussion part in this section consists of a single suspended-cymbal hit and two timpani rolls, one on the first measure of the section and one on a pedal tone G through the last three measures before the postlude.

Throughout the main body of the movement, Bernstein uses conventional harmonies and a slow harmonic rhythm to allow the voices to sing with a Brahmsian lyricism. Here we see the unabashed American romantic, a classical composer capable of writing immediately accessible lyric melodies similar to those found in his show music “Somewhere” and “Make our Garden Grow” (from West Side Story and Candide, respectively). While the first and second movements come from “an amalgam of musical influences—Hebrew liturgy, the classical repertoire, jazz, popular music—that were a part of his life,” the body of the third movement is more akin to the style of a Broadway musical, and much

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7Myers, 225.
less harmonically challenging to the listener and to the performer.

Following the first complete entrance of the choir, the strings have a sonorous eight-measure solo quartet at measure 37. This interlude is a restatement and meditation on the “Adonai, Adonai” theme previously presented by the men and subsequently by the women (with the men echoing at the octave, at a rhythmic interval of one-half measure). During the solo quartet, Bernstein does not stray far from the tonic key of G, and he uses the same series of sequences and harmonic changes to retransition into the choral climax as he used to announce the duet after the men’s opening statement. The effect is simple yet beautiful. The eight measures of string interlude and the choir and quartet’s fifteen measures that follow at measure 45 continue in the key of G major and provide a final statement of the “Adonai, Adonai” theme.

The solo quartet that ends the main section of the third movement, although quite lovely, is very difficult to sing in tune. There are at least three reasons why more frequently than not—in live performance as well as in rehearsal—this section is problematic:

1. The soprano and tenor sing in unison at the octave, and their melodic line lies right in the middle of the pasaggio of both voice parts.
2. This section has the only vocal leaps of a ninth in the whole movement, and Bernstein saves the most interesting harmonic accompaniment for this final statement of the theme.
3. The last chord of the quartet (which is actually a trio at this point, as the tenor does not sing the final measure) is written in first inversion, and the soprano will have a tendency to sing sharp, because the penultimate note

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8Nine measures of choir, followed by six measures of solo vocal quartet.
of her solo is a high A-flat against a pedal G (albeit three octaves away) in the timpani and low strings. When she resolves, from her unfortunately sharp A-flat, she will invariably sing a sharp G-natural, and the final chord will not ring true.

It is recommended that the singers be placed very close to each other, ideally on stage left where they will be able to hear the basses and celli. If the conductor coaches the quartet adequately and warns them about the potential problems of intonation at the end, a minor musical tragedy may be avoided. Stage placement will help to remedy this problem.

Following the solo quartet, the *Chichester Psalms* ends with the poignant “Hineh mah tov, umah nayim, shevet achim gam yachad.”9 The ending is shown in its entirety in figure 17:

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9 “Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”
Figure 17: Final Statement of Chichester Psalms
(Continued on next page)
Figure 17: Final Statement of Chichester Psalms
(Concluded)
The first movement’s opening melody is now presented in its entirety, the only alteration coming in the last measure, which must be changed to give closure to the final movement. Bernstein harmonizes the four-measure, *a cappella* setting of the first verse of Psalm 133 with expansive, open chords that move in principally parallel motion to each other. The emphasis on the interval of a seventh, which is so important in the opening movement, comes back as the first measure resolves with an added non-harmonic seventh in the tenor line. In the second measure, the basses have the added tone, this time a ninth. The third measure of the postlude resolves to a plagal C major triad, and the fourth measure (marked *pppp* for the choir) ends with a breathless G and D in open fifths and a long fermata. The two-measure “Amen” that completes the work calls for the re-entry of the strings. The trumpet and harp solos echo the Prelude by playing the first five notes of the opening theme of the work one last time. The final note is to be held as long as possible, dictated by the breath control of the soloist playing muted trumpet on the high G.

One successful method of rehearsing the last six measures of the work is to have the choir sing them as a warm-up for each rehearsal. It provides a nice preparation for purposes of legato and tuning, and the choir learns the ending so well that they literally learn to sing it with their eyes closed. Ideally the performance will end with the choir performing completely by memory, with perfect intonation and total musical and emotional expression of the Hebrew text.
CHAPTER FIVE

LEONARD BERNSTEIN’S MISSA BREVIS:
AN INTRODUCTION AND STUDY GUIDE FOR CONDUCTORS

The Missa brevis of Leonard Bernstein has its roots in secular music. The work saw its genesis in 1955 when Lillian Hellman, the great American playwright (who bravely refused to testify before Senator Joseph McCarthy and his House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952 and was subsequently blacklisted from Hollywood) asked Bernstein to write incidental music for The Lark, a play about Joan of Arc by Jean Anouilh that Hellman was translating from the French and adapting for the American stage.1

Bernstein’s score was meant to represent the internal voices that encouraged Joan to lead her troops to victory at Orleans.2 Brooks Atkinson, the New York Times theater critic, wrote: “Leonard Bernstein’s musical recreation of Joan’s medieval voices gives the play a new dimension.”3

After Shaw saw the play and heard the taped incidental music recorded by

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1The play saw a successful run of 229 performances on Broadway, with a cast that included Julie Harris as Joan of Arc, Boris Karloff, Christopher Plummer, and Theodore Bikel. Peyser, Bernstein, 247-9. Peyser’s best selling but unsatisfactory biography on Bernstein views the musician as a meglomaniacal, self-centered, sex-obsessed, hypochondriacal, alcoholic, and fully despicable character. In his annotated bibliography, Paul Myers writes on p. 231 that Peyser has written, “An unattractive investigation of some of the tabloid aspects of Bernstein’s private life, it nevertheless presents good background material on post-war musical developments. It includes some questionable, speculative theories on Bernstein’s psychological make-up.” He is too kind in his use of the words questionable and speculative.

2Myers, 93.

Noah Greenberg and seven members of the New York Pro Musica Antiqua, “a group specializing in pre-seventeenth-century music,”⁴ he “suggested to Bernstein that with some changes and additions the music would make an effective Missa brevis. Thirty-three years later, in honor of Maestro Shaw’s retirement as Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Bernstein followed his colleague’s suggestions.”⁵

The Missa brevis is an anomaly within Bernstein’s catalogue for several reasons: it is the only piece of significant, non-solo work that Bernstein never conducted or recorded himself; it is his only published a cappella work for choir (excepting the Choruses from “The Lark”—the incidental music from which he borrowed most of the Missa’s musical material); and it is his only published work that has never seen a professional recording.⁶

Each of the six movements of the Missa brevis is a reworking of music written for Hellman’s play. In the published score for the Choruses from “The Lark,” Bernstein divides the eight choruses into two parts. The three French choruses (with drum) make up part one, and the five Latin choruses (with bells) make up part two. Each of the Latin choruses is incorporated in some way into the Missa brevis, but only the first of the French choruses (Spring Song) is used in the later

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⁵Ibid.

⁶In 1988, Robert Shaw recorded an earlier version of the Missa brevis for Telarc with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, but its inner movements are so dramatically different from the published edition as to be a different Missa brevis altogether. Indeed, the final revision of the Missa brevis that is now available from Boosey and Hawkes has the following note on its title page: “An earlier version of the Missa brevis has been recorded by the Atlanta Symphony Chorus, Robert Shaw Conductor, on Telarc CD-80181.” It could also say, “Don’t listen to this recording with the idea that it will help you to learn the work, as the published score is very different from what you’ll hear on this recording.”
work. The *Kyrie* and the *Alleluia* section of the *Dona nobis pacem* are note-for-note recreations of their original musical format, although the text is changed.7

Bernstein chose a harmonic language for the work that is distinctly modern. He places great emphasis on open sonorities and octaves, and his hallmark irregular meters seem perfectly at ease supporting both the original French of the *Choruses from “The Lark”* and the Latin of the *Missa brevis*.

The work opens with a short, thirteen-measure *Kyrie* in C. Bernstein dispenses with the traditional three statements; instead of repeating or elongating “eleison,” as in most settings, he repeats “kyrie” twice for each “eleison.” The hard “k” sound provides a markedly percussive effect. Bernstein writes that the short movement should *crescendo* steadily to a climactic eighth measure and then, after a measure of *forte, diminuendo a niente* to the *attacca* into the *Gloria*. The opening movement ends on a half cadence, shown in figure 18:

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7The *Kyrie*’s music was originally set to a portion of text from the Introit to the Catholic Requiem Mass. In this form, it comprised the fourth movement of the Latin Choruses. Slight changes to the piece for the *Missa brevis* were made to accommodate the words. Musically, the *Dona nobis pacem/Alleluia* is an exact musical replica of the first of the French Choruses, except that Bernstein omits 20 measures—the final repeat of the main theme.
Figure 18: Ending of Kyrie, Showing Twice-Repeated Kyrie and Half Cadence
The *Gloria* from the *Missa brevis* is based on the movement from the *Choruses from “The Lark”* by the same name, but it is elongated to allow for the additional text necessary for the *Laudate Dominum*. The movement is centered around a tonal center of A, with the modality changing throughout. Bernstein uses many unresolved non-harmonic tones as part of the harmony in this section.

The *Gloria* of the *Missa brevis* is a difficult piece of choral music—especially from the performer’s perspective. In the original format Bernstein had few qualms about voicing the sopranos on high Gs and As for extended periods of time, because the *Choruses from “The Lark”* was written for professional singers; he maintains the extended ranges in the updated work. The tenor and baritone *tessituras* are also quite high. But the greatest difficulty in the piece is maintaining pitch and intonation throughout. Because the *Missa brevis* is scored only, in Bernstein’s words, “with Incidental Percussion”—and the hybrid Renaissance meets mid-twentieth-century-America musical language is rare within the standard repertoire—the choir must know the piece well to perform it admirably. The ensemble for which the *Choruses from “The Lark”* was written sang with perfect straight-tone most of the time; many non-madrigal choirs will have difficulty achieving the timbre and pure intonation that Bernstein had in mind when he wrote the piece. The ensemble will learn to hear some concrete pitches within the bell parts, but if the entire work is to be performed as composed, they ultimately must sing ten minutes of difficult unaccompanied choral music perfectly in tune, because each movement is written *attacca*.

The *Gloria* is the longest movement of the work. Its form is as shown in figure 19:
The four sections that make up the movement begin with a wonderful oscillation between A major and A minor, with an added major second and major seventh. The chords in figure 20 are cultivated from the opening Latin chorus (Prelude) from the Choruses from “The Lark.”

Figure 20: Opening Chords to Gloria

After eleven measures of slow, declamatory repetition of the first line of the second section of the mass (and the introduction of the countertenor soloist8) the first section resolves to A minor, with an added perfect fourth and major seventh.

8Bernstein writes, “This solo may be sung by an alto, preferably a boy alto. The voice should have little vibrato and a pure sound. It is not to be sung by a soprano.” Leonard Bernstein, Missa brevis (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1988), 5.
functioning as non-harmonic color in the chords. Parts of the *Missa brevis* can be easily analyzed as bi-tonal, but bi-tonality is probably not the harmonic language that Bernstein had in mind. More often than not, the chords sound like jazz: added fourths, sixths, sevenths, ninths, eleventh, and thirteenth make for a warm, rich sonority.

The *Laudamus te*, which begins at measure 12 on page 9 of the *Gloria*, can be heard as a thirty-eight measure, dance-like build up to the *Domine rex caelestis*, the third section of the *Gloria*. The third measure of the *Domine Deus* on page 17 sees the first entrance of the bells. It is shown in figure 21:
Figure 21: First Entrance of the Bells
Bernstein writes of this effect:

All percussion is optional with the exception of the bells (chimes). There are two sets of bells, one in each wing or on each side of the chorus, each having at least three different notes (any notes at all, but preferably covering a wide range). The notes should be sounded one at a time at the most rapid possible tempo.\(^9\)

The aleatoric and visually theatrical element of adding bells with an indeterminate number of available pitches, rhythms, and volume (Bernstein dictates duration by writing one measure for each entrance) allows for an exciting aspect of chance and creativity in each performance. The conductor should choose pitches carefully; the less experienced the ensemble, the more important it is to find some anchor notes in the bells that will help, not hinder, the intonation of the ensemble.

The bells assume a much more prominent role in the *Quoniam*, where they alternate entrances from opposite sides of the stage throughout the movement, and complete the *Gloria* by sounding through a fermata for an extended period of time.

The *Credo*, with its voluminous text, is omitted in Bernstein’s setting. The *Sanctus* (*p. 33*) begins with a pianissimo entrance marked *misterioso* for the choir, in great contrast to the *fortissimo* bells that end the previous movement. The *Sanctus* is set with its tonality alternating between G dorian and G major.

The bipartite form can easily be reduced, as shown in figure 22:

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10*Missa brevis* (Bernstein writes “ad lib”).
The alternation between modes, demonstrated most beautifully by the Dorian entrance of the choir followed by a G mixolydian answer from the countertenor (with a wonderful, melismatic solo), gives the Sanctus one of the most ancient sounding timbres in the work. The chant-like, improvisatory solo is shown, following a four-measure choral introduction, in figure 23:

**Figure 22: Form of Sanctus**
Figure 23: Opening of Sanctus
As with all of Bernstein’s music, the dynamics are specific and complete throughout the piece. The conductor must insist on constant growth from the *piano* downbeat to the *fortississimo* final measure for the movement to have the intended effect, that of the cherubim praising the heavenly host with all their might.

The *Benedictus* (p.41) continues the practice of call-and-response that began with the opening of the *Sanctus*. The forty-three-measure *Benedictus* begins with a five-measure recitative in which the countertenor intones the traditional benediction in three separate sections: *Benedictus, qui veni,* and *in nomine Domini,* while the choir chants *Osanna in excelsis* after each of the soloist’s statements. The effect created is that of a high priest blessing the congregation with the choir affirming its support of his statements.

This opening blessing is followed by thirty-eight measures of musical intensification in the form of *stretto* and *accelerando* toward a brilliant ending in A major, this time colored by an added non-harmonic second and whatever notes the conductor and percussionist choose for the combined chimes. The seven phrases that make up the main section of the *Benedictus* are an unbridled statement of joy, and as in three previous places in the *Missa brevis,* they represent an organic explosion of sound from a soft dynamic to a full-throated *forte*. This convention of *crescendo*, so prevalent in the piece, belies the work’s genesis as incidental music for the theater. Certainly, if we were to hear the music in its original form, while viewing the stage action it was meant to accompany, we would see immediately where the impetus for such explosive dynamics originate.

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11 Movement One, complete; *Quoniam*, 27-32; *Sanctus* 37-40.
Bernstein, a composer who seldom indulges in musical understatement, outdoes himself with the seemingly endless crescendi that mushroom through so much of the work.

The final two sections, Agnus Dei and Dona nobis pacem, are effectively one movement, united through thematic material and key structure. The form of the ending is shown in figure 24:

**Figure 24: Form of Agnus Dei and Dona nobis pacem**

The *Agnus Dei* begins with the same chords as the *Gloria*. The six-measure phrase gives way to the most glorious music of the entire work, the nine-measure *Qui tollis*. After these fifteen measures are repeated, the opening chords sound one last time, as *Agnus Dei* reappears. However, this time the countertenor sings the opening theme in a four-measure extension of the original phrase. After the section resolves to A minor, with an additional non-harmonic major second and major seventh, a tabor announces the final dance on *Dona nobis pacem* and
Alleluia.

The final section of the work, the Dona nobis pacem, is the only part of the Missa brevis to originate in the French (or secular) Choruses from “The Lark.” An ode to Claude le Jeune’s sixteenth-century Revecy venir le printans, the movement is built on the same rhythm as this vers mesuré chanson shown in figure 25:

![Rhythmic Figure from the Sixteenth Century](image)

**Figure 25: Rhythmic Figure from the Sixteenth Century**

When Bernstein selected the dance-like music to end the Missa brevis, he changed the alternating time signature from 3/4 + 6/8 to 3/4 throughout. This must be either an oversight or a typographical error. The movement retains the original Renaissance flavor, and conductors are encouraged to alternate the measures by conducting in three or in two, accordingly.

Like all the sections and movements preceding it, the Dona nobis pacem exhibits great dynamic contrast. Built on a theme that rises stepwise for six notes and then descends for two, the energy that is created by the combination of the ostinato drum and the rising voices, entering one section at a time, makes for a thrilling conclusion to Bernstein’s little mass. The opening of the last movement is shown in figure 26:
Figure 26: Opening of Dona nobis pacem
The composer deleted twenty measures from the original theatrical version, giving the finale a tighter form and a more succinct ending. He also writes that all percussion can play *ad libitum*. There are some wonderful moments where a creative conductor, ideally with input from the percussionist, may add some interesting instrumental color with tambourines, bells, suspended cymbal, and hand clapping from the ensemble.

The *Missa brevis* takes approximately ten minutes and thirty seconds to perform in its entirety. Like more famous ten-minute pieces by Brahms, Beethoven, and Barber, it demands significant effort to learn, but it requires no orchestra. The percussion parts are simple enough to be played by members of the ensemble, and it can be programmed on a non-orchestrally accompanied choral concert most satisfactorily. The singers and the audience find irresistible the rhythm, the beautiful harmonies, and the interaction between soloist, percussionist, and ensemble. The compact form, varied dynamics, and dramatic jazz-influenced harmonies make this, Bernstein’s only significant *a cappella* choral work, a pleasure to hear, to sing, and to conduct. For a piece that was created out of completely recycled material, it sounds fresh, interesting, and full of the *joie de vivre* that is unmistakably Leonard Bernstein.

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12The Alto Rhapsodie, Nänie, Meerestile und Glückliches Fährt, and Agnus Dei (the choral arrangement of the Adagio for Strings, which, like the Bernstein’s Missa brevis, is meant to be performed *a cappella*).
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