

In 1965, Leonard Bernstein received a commission from the 1965 Southern Cathedral Festival to compose a piece for the cathedral choirs of Chichester, Winchester, and Salisbury. The result was the three-movement Chichester Psalms, a choral setting of a number of Hebrew psalm texts. This is Bernstein's version of church music: rhythmic, dramatic, yet fundamentally spiritual.

The piece opens with the choir proclaiming Psalm 108, verse 2 (Awake, psaltery and harp!). This opening figure (particularly the upward leap of a minor seventh) recurs throughout the piece. The introduction leads into Psalm 100 (Make a joyful noise unto the Lord), a 7/4 dance that fits the joyous mood of the text. At times, this movement sounds like something out of West Side Story - it is percussive, with driving dance rhythms.

The second movement starts with Psalm 23, with only a solo boy soprano and harp (suggesting David); the sopranos of the choir enter, repeating the solo melody. Suddenly and forcefully, the men interrupt in the middle of the Psalm 23 text (just after "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me") with Psalm 2. The setting of this text differs greatly from the flowing melodic feel of Psalm 23; it is evocative of the conflict in the text, with the men at times almost shouting. The men's voices gradually fade, and the initial peaceful melody returns (along with the rest of the Psalm 23 text), with the men continuing underneath.

Movement 3 begins with an instrumental introduction based on the opening figure of the piece. The choir then enters with Psalm 131, set in a fluid 10/4 meter. The last lines included from Psalm 131 (Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and forever) are sung by soloists, leading into Psalm 133. This is sung by unaccompanied choir (a hushed chorale setting of the opening figure), ending the movement with a serene message of peace.

Part I

Psalm 108, verse 2 (Maestoso ma energico)

Urah, hanevel, v'chinor!	Awake, psaltery and harp!
A-irah shahar!	I will rouse the dawn!

Psalm 100 (Allegro molto)

Hariu l'Adonai kol haarets.	Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.
Iv'du et Adonai b'simha.	Serve the Lord with gladness.
Bo-u l'fanav bir'nanah.	Come before his presence with singing.
D'u ki Adonai Hu Elohim.	Know ye that the Lord, He is God.
Hu asanu, v'lo anahnu.	It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves
Amo v'tson mar'ito.	We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Bo-u sh'arav b'todah,	Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
Hatseirotav bit'hilah,	And into His courts with praise.
Hodu lo, bar'chu sh'mo.	Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.
Ki tov Adonai, l'olam has'do,	For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting.
V'ad dor vador emunato.	And His truth endureth to all generations.

Part II

Psalm 23 (Andante con moto, ma tranquillo)

Adonai ro-i, lo ehsar.	The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
Bin'ot deshe yarbitseini,	He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
Al mei m'nuhot y'nahaleini,	He leadeth me beside the still waters,
Naf'shi y'shovev,	He restoreth my soul,
Yan'heini b'ma'aglei tsedek,	He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness,
L'ma'an sh'mo.	For His name's sake.
Gam ki eilech	Yea, though I walk
B'gei tsalmavet,	Through the valley of the shadow of death,
Lo ira ra,	I will fear no evil,
Ki Atah imadi.	For Thou art with me.
Shiv't'cha umishan'techa	Thy rod and Thy staff
Hemah y'nahamuni.	They comfort me.

Psalm 2, verses 1-4 (Allegro feroce)

Lamah rag'shu goyim	Why do the nations rage,
Ul'umim yeh'gu rik?	And the people imagine a vain thing?
Yit'yats'vu malchei erets,	The kings of the earth set themselves up,
V'roznim nos'du yahad	And the rulers take counsel together
Al Adonai v'al m'shiho.	Against the Lord and against His anointed.
N'natkah et mos'roteimo,	Saying, let us break their bonds asunder,
Yoshev bashamayim	He that sitteth in the heavens
Yis'hak, Adonai	Shall laugh, and the Lord
Yil'ag lamo!	Shall have them in derision!

Psalm 23, continued (Meno come prima)

Ta'aroch l'fanai shulchan	Thou preparest a table before me
Neged tsor'rai	In the presence of mine enemies,
Dishanta vashemen roshi	Thou anointest my head with oil,
Cosi r'vayah.	My cup runneth over.
Ach tov vahesed	Surely goodness and mercy
Yird'funi kol y'mei hayai	Shall follow me all the days of my life,
V'shav'ti b'veit Adonai	And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
L'orech yamim.	Forever.

Part III

Psalm 131 (Peacefully flowing)

Adonai, Adonai,	Lord, Lord,
Lo gavah libi,	My heart is not haughty;
V'lo ramu einai,	Nor mine eyes lofty,
V'lo hilachti	Neither do I exercise myself
Big'dolot uv'niflaot	In great matters or in things
Mimeni.	Too wonderful for me.
Im lo shiviti	Surely I have calmed
V'domam'ti,	And quieted myself,
Naf'shi k'gamul alei imo,	As a child that is weaned of his mother,
Kagamul alai naf'shi.	My soul is even as a weaned child.

Yahel Yis'rael el Adonai	Let Israel hope in the Lord
Me'atah v'ad olam.	From henceforth and forever.

Psalm 133, verse 1

Hineh mah tov,	Behold how good,
Umah nayim,	And how pleasant it is,
Shevet ahim	For brethren to dwell
Gam yahad.	Together in unity.