

At about the mid-point of John Harbison's *Four Psalms*, contrapuntal density and symphonic richness subside, laying bare a lonely, subtly orchestrated arpeggio in the piano and harp—up, down, up, down, up—its bluntness offset by curious dissonances at its extremes. A Visitor to Israel (baritone) intones: “At the music school I watched a group of children listening.” Next a mirror image of the same arpeggio—down, up, down, up, down—followed by the soloist: “And as I watched, their faces fused with the photograph at the museum.” Now the arpeggio and its mirror simultaneously, then the singer: “the dark-haired children at the shtetl, Poland, nineteen thirty-four.” The text painting here is transparent: Children practicing their arpeggios in the music school, the combination of the inversionally related arpeggios representing the fusions of the living and the dead children in the imagination of the observer. It is a harrowing moment.

The chorus echoes the soloist's concluding four notes: It is the start of a somber passacaglia theme, which eventually recedes into the background, overwhelmed by lyrical, expressive counterpoint in the chorus and orchestra. The text here, sung in Hebrew, is Psalm 137: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we thought of Zion.” This Psalm laments the exile of the Jews to Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E., and sings of their longing for return: “If I forget you O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate, if I cease to think of you, if I do not raise up Jerusalem above my highest joy.” Firmly anchored to its repeating musical theme, the psalm setting develops inexorably from tentative beginning to rousing climax and back to a cadence of reflective equipoise. The soloist in modern voice takes over once again, now an Israeli Politician: “My parents' dream: to awaken someday in Eretz Israel. A hero's journey—escape from Poland, back through Germany, secret boat from Italy. A journey of two thousand years. But they found it, saw the dawn in the land they had dreamed.”

The juxtaposition of this ancient Biblical poem and these contemporary observations reflects images of modern Jewish history, centered upon the Holocaust, in Biblical Jewish history, and likewise reflects Biblical stories in the modern history of the Jews. The theme is a familiar but an urgent one: the inseparability of Jewish identity from the Holocaust, its aftermath, and the hundreds of years of European anti-Semitism of which it was the terrible climax. It is one of several important themes connecting Biblical and modern Israel in Harbison's epic composition.

Four Psalms was commissioned by the Israeli Consulate of Chicago in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary in 1998 of the founding of the state of Israel. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Christoph Eschenbach premiered the work in 1999.

In preparation for the composition Harbison traveled to Israel in 1997, where he met and conversed with diverse people—politicians, visitors, tour guides, citizens—Jews, Arabs, Palestinians. It is from among transcriptions of these conversations that the English texts of the solo sections (soprano, tenor, and baritone) are drawn. The choral texts are Psalms 114, 126, 137, and 133, rendered in the original Hebrew. Although the psalms and solo sections are performed without pause, the choruses are the musical centers of gravity—formally and thematically unified movements. The solo sections interposed among the psalms are episodic by comparison, as motivically, harmonically, and texturally varied as the personalities that they embody.

Standing outside of this scheme is an imposing Prelude for mezzo-soprano soloist and orchestra. The text is from the fifth century C.E. by the rabbi and mystic Amemar of Babylon. It is a Hebrew prayer expressing a dream of hope for Israel: “And just as you transformed the curse of the wicked Balaam from a curse to a blessing, so may you transform all of my dreams regarding myself and regarding all of Israel for goodness.” The music strikes a tone of timeless ritual that has characterized some of Harbison's most powerful work (e.g., *Mirabai Songs*, *A Full Moon in March*). Here Jewish liturgy is evoked, and the vocal writing recalls cantorial declamation. The sinuous vocal line traces a dramatic arch over the whole Prelude, but the musical scaffold is organized according to the sonata principle: two contrasting orchestral ideas with different harmonic profiles, a short development, and a return to the opening ideas harmonically reconciled. There is tension in this Prelude between the centripetal tendency of referential pitches (an open fifth, the archetypal consonance) and the centrifugal tendency of dissonant harmonies worked out according to their own intervallic laws. The interrelationship of these two harmonic tendencies pervades much of Harbison's music and transcends its stylistic diversity. Here, however, the interweaving of consonance and dissonance is brought to a culminating synthesis. There is a profound sense of both mystery and of harmonic closure at the concluding “ameyn,” the fifth in the foreground supporting a rich layer of dissonance. The Prelude casts its shadow over the much longer movement that follows, and its musical ideas recur there like leitmotifs. However, its architecture is autonomous and freestanding, its atmosphere timeless and prophetic.

Four Psalms is sustained by a mood of optimism. The Israeli occupation and the (first) Intifada find their way into

Harbison's unflinching account. In 1998, however, the opening words of Psalm 133, juxtaposed with it, seemed a little less remote from reality than perhaps they do today, a scant but grim five years later: "How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together." The chorus delivers the text in gentle imitative rivulets of modal figuration; the soloists are enlisted here for the only time in a psalm rendering; even the mezzo-soprano returns at the close, connecting the vision of the psalmist with the dream of Amemar. The unmistakable message is the blessing of cooperation and reconciliation. This concluding psalm setting yields to an impulse of unmediated beauty and charm, delivered after an extraordinary musical journey of almost forty minutes.

John Harbison is a composer of exceptional literary as well as musical gifts. His work evolves in counterpoint with his sense of history, and his imagination is fired by enormous challenges. *Four Psalms* is an example. Others include a ballet based on the *Odyssey*, a setting of the *Requiem*, and an opera based on a classic of American literature, *The Great Gatsby*. These works, and others (like the formidable *Second Symphony*) are among the masterworks of our turn-of-the-century period of American concert music. Although he has received numerous awards, there is sense of selflessness about him, of service to music and musicians, present and emerging. This manifests itself through his teaching, his conducting, and his efforts on behalf of other composers, especially the young. Selflessness is a feature of his music, too, which is never indulgent, always economical, a mustering of imaginative and technical resources in the service of the clearest and most powerful expression possible of the *idea*.

In the light of this assessment, I cannot help but think of his choice of text for *Emerson*, an a cappella composition for double choir, as an homage, a statement of faith: "The world globes itself in a drop of dew. The microscope cannot find the animalcule which is less perfect for being little. . . . So do we put our life into every act." The piece was commissioned by the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Music for their 100th Anniversary in 1995. The text is taken from Emerson's philosophical prose. Although the text is enlivened by its rhetorical gestures, and its subject matter is to some degree "poetic," its rhythms and form are nonetheless those of prose rather than verse. This poses a special problem for a composer, and it highlights the degree to which, in our vocal writing, we generally coordinate our phrase rhythms and forms with those of the poetry we are setting. Harbison's treatment of the text in *Emerson* recalls the radical subordination of music to word of the early Baroque *seconda pratica*. Harmony, motive, gesture, and phrase change mercurially with the text, underscoring and illustrating its changing imagery and meaning.

Some of Harbison's favorite devices are exemplified in this piece: ostinato at the beginning, extended fugato in the second movement. Above all, the piece illustrates the composer's recurring preoccupation with harmonic and melodic symmetry. His treatment of Psalm 126 in *Four Psalms* does too. There, the chorus divides antiphonally: Harmonized melodic figures in one section of the chorus call forth their exact melodic and harmonic mirror inversions in response. In *Emerson*, mirror inversions permeate the design throughout. Large swaths of choral counterpoint proceed in mirror inversions, producing a distinctive harmonic palette that colors much of the composition. At other times Harbison uses this device to complement Emerson's philosophical rhetoric with an analogous musical rhetoric. Mirror-symmetrical chords are both the "same" and "different," unified by their intervallic content—the same intervals upside-down—but contrasting in terms of their quality. (Except in the cases where pitch collections invert symmetrically into themselves, for example, the diminished seventh chord or the whole-tone scale, mirror patterns have contrasting qualities, or "colors." Thus, for example, the major triad inverts symmetrically to the minor triad; the robust, cheerful major mode inverts symmetrically to the dark, gloomy Phrygian mode, and so forth.) This feature is a resource that Harbison uses to suggest the unity of opposites captured, for example, in Emerson's "If the good is there, so is the evil; if the affinity, so the repulsion; if the force, so the limitation." Here, the oppositions are captured registerally (men answered by women, and vice versa) and harmonically (chords answered by their mirror inversions). Similarly, the opening ostinato figure repeats the text "Man is timid and apologetic," and the complementation between "timid" and "apologetic" is emphasized by the mirror chords that harmonize them.

—Peter Child

Peter Child is a composer and Professor of Music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Emerson

Part I

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say "I think," "I am," but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose.

Those roses under my window make no reference to former roses or better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.

Before the leaf bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike.

But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tip-toe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.

Part II

The world globes itself in a drop of dew. The microscope cannot find the animalcule which is less perfect for being little. Eyes, ears, taste, smell, motion, resistance, appetite, and organs of reproduction that take hold on eternity—all find room to consist in the small creature. So do we put our life into every act.

If the good is there, so is the evil; if the affinity, so the repulsion; if the force, so the limitation. Cause and effect; means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed. Thus is the universe alive.

John Harbison is one of America's most prominent composers. Among his principal works are four string quartets, three symphonies, and several other large orchestral works, three operas, including *The Great Gatsby*, commissioned by The Metropolitan Opera and premiered in December 1999, and the cantata *The Flight Into Egypt*, which earned him the 1987 Pulitzer Prize. Other awards include the Kennedy Center Friedheim First Prize, a MacArthur Fellowship, the Heinz Award, the American Composers Orchestra Distinguished Composer Award, the Harvard Arts Medal, and the American Music Center's Letter of Distinction. He also holds four honorary doctorates.

Recent premieres have included *Requiem*, for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Piano Sonata No. 2, for Robert Levin, String Quartet No. 4, for the Orion String Quartet, and *The Violists' Notebook*. Mr. Harbison is currently at work on his fourth symphony (for the centennial anniversary of the Seattle Symphony), a sinfonietta for the Chicago Chamber Players, and he has just completed a piano trio, *Short Stories*, which will receive its premiere in summer 2004.

Harbison has been composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Tanglewood, Marlboro, Aspen, Ojai, and Santa Fe festivals, and the American Academy in Rome. More than fifty of his works have been recorded on the Nonesuch, Northeastern, Harmonia Mundi, New World, Deutsche Grammophon, Decca, Koch, Albany, and CRI labels. Recordings of his *Cello Concerto* and the ballet *Ulysses* will be released in 2004. Harbison has conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, the Cantata Singers, and the Handel & Haydn Society. For many years he has been principal guest conductor of Emmanuel Music, in Boston.

Harbison was born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1938 and received an undergraduate degree from Harvard and an MFA from Princeton University. He is currently Institute Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Furthering the work of younger composers is one of Harbison's prime interests, and he serves on the board of directors of the Koussevitsky Foundation and is president of the Copland Fund. He resides part-time near Madison, Wisconsin, where with his wife, Rose Mary, he directs the annual Token Creek Chamber Music Festival. His music is published exclusively by Associated Music Publishers.

The Cantata Singers & Ensemble was founded in 1964 to prepare and present what was then a long-neglected

repertoire—the cantatas of J. S. Bach. Since that time, led by such distinguished music directors as John Harbison, John Ferris, and David Hoose, the group has expanded its repertoire to include works from the seventeenth century to the present day. Winner of the 1995 ASCAP/Chorus America Award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music, the organization is dedicated to challenging programming, including the commissioning of new works. Under David Hoose's direction the group has commissioned and premiered six major choral-orchestral works: T. J. Anderson's *Slavery Documents 2*; Andy Vores's *World Wheel*; Andrew Imbrie's *Adam*; Donald Sur's *Slavery Documents*; Peter Child's *Estrella*; and John Harbison's *The Flight Into Egypt*, winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Music. The group has recorded works of Bach, Schütz, Schein, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, as well as the American composers Irving Fine, David Chaitkin, Seymour Shifrin, John Harbison, Peter Child, and Charles Fussell. The Cantata Singers' recordings and performances in New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall can be heard regularly on local and national radio, most often on WGBH-FM (Boston) and on the program *First Art* throughout the United States.

David Hoose, Music Director of the Cantata Singers & Ensemble since 1982, is also Music Director of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. In addition, Mr. Hoose, who is highly respected for his performances of twentieth-century music, is Music Director of the new-music ensemble Collage. He has conducted the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, the Utah Symphony, the KBS Symphony (Korea), the Saint Louis Symphony, and Orchestra Regionale Toscana, among others. As Director of Orchestral Activities at Boston University, he is chairman of the Conducting Department and conductor of the Boston University Symphony Orchestra. In 1980 he received the Dmitri Mitropoulos Award in Conducting. As a horn player, he was a founding member of the Naumburg Award-winning Emmanuel Wind Quintet.

Frank Kelley, tenor, has performed with the San Francisco Opera, the Boston Lyric Opera, several opera companies throughout Europe, and in numerous Peter Sellars productions. He has appeared with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the National Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and has performed with ensembles including the Boston Camerata, Emmanuel Music, the Handel & Haydn Society, Boston Baroque, and Sequentia. His festival appearances include the Marlboro Music, Nakamichi, New England Bach, Next Wave, Blossom, Boston Early Music, and Pepsico Summerfare festivals. He has recorded for London, Decca, Erato, and Harmonia Mundi France, among others.

Baritone **David Kravitz** has received wide critical acclaim for his singing, his acting, and his careful attention to text, on both the operatic and the concert stages. He has appeared under conductors Seiji Ozawa, Roger Norrington, David Hoose, Craig Smith, Martin Pearlman, Grant Llewellyn, and Gil Rose. His opera roles include Leporello and the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress*. Concert appearances include major works of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Britten, as well as new works by John Harbison, Andy Vores, and Edward Cohen.

Lynn Torgove, mezzo-soprano, was an original member of the Peter Sellars/Craig Smith production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Other operatic roles include the Son/Juniper Bird in Philip Glass's *The Juniper Tree* and Polly Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*. She has appeared with the Saint Louis Symphony, the Portland Symphony Orchestra, the Tallahassee Symphony, the Springfield Symphony (Ohio), the Berkshire Choral Festival, and the Boston Lyric Opera. Recent engagements include a tour with the Boston Camerata, performances and recording of Lukas Foss's *Griffelkin* with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and recitals with pianist Kayo Iwama in works of John Harbison and Andy Vores.

Majie Zeller has received critical praise for her performances in both mezzo-soprano and soprano roles. Her opera roles include Angelina in *La Cenerentola*, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, and Prince Orlovsky in *Die Fledermaus*, as well as featured roles in John Adams's *Nixon in China*, Philip Glass's *Akhmatov*, and Tod Machover's *Resurrection*. Concert appearances include major works of Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Copland, and Harbison. She has appeared as a soloist with the Cantata Singers, Emmanuel Music, the Michigan Opera Theater, Opera Boston, the Boston Lyric Opera and others under conductors David Hoose, Craig Smith, Leon Fleisher, Beatrice Jona Affron, and Stephen Lord.

Four Psalms

Chorus

Soprano

Luellen Best
Meaghan Boeing
Kathryn Carlson
Kumi Donaghue
Rebecca Hayden
Angelynne Hinson
Kathy Howard
Denise Konicek
Barbara Levy
Holly Loring
Suzanne McAllister
Susan K. Navien
Hazel O'Donnell
Jaylyn Olivo
Wendy Perrotta
Gail Reitter
Karyl Ryczek
Epp Sonin
Mary Beth Stevens
Christine Swistro
Sangwon Woo

Alto

Ann Busby
Paula Dickerman
Barbara Ehrmann
Mary Hamilton
Jessica Hanf
Cristine Hernandez-Malaby
Kathleen Kew
April Kimmel
Sheryl Krevsky
Leslie Lanagan
Anne Lyman
Deborah Cundey Owen
Catherine Radmer
Gloria Raymond
Diane Sokal
Lynn Torgove
Sara Wyse-Wenger
Majie Zeller

Tenor

Thomas Best
Paul Blanchard
Steven Crawford
William Cutter
Jim DeSelms

Carey Erdman
Christopher Fitzpatrick
Edward Hinson
Charles Husbands
Donald Lindsay
Lenny Ng
Peter A. Owens
Dwight E. Porter
Anand Sarwate
Richard Simpson
Irl Smith
Martin Thomson

Bass

Brian Church
Mark Andrew Cleveland
Benjamin Cole
Jim Egede-Nissen
Marc Falk
Eugene Gover
John Graef
Robert Henry
Matthew Hume
David Kravitz
David Lifland
Alan McLellan
Paul Rahmeier
Scott Street
Daryl Yoder

Orchestra

Violin I

Danielle Maddon
Jennifer Elowitch
Clayton Hoener
Lena Wong
Julie Leven
Hilary Foster
Lisa Crockett
Colin Davis

Violin II

Dianne Pettipaw
Jodi Hagen
Karma Tomm
Deborah Boykan
Anne Marie Chubet
Sarita Uranovsky
Shufang Du
Yeon-Su Kim

Viola

Anne Black
Susan Seeber

Joan Ellersick
Jennifer Stirling
Kate Vincent
Lisa Suslowicz

Cello

Beth Pearson
Lynn Nowels
Ronald Lowry
Michael Curry
Jan Mueller-Szeraws
Shannon Snapp Natale

Bass

Deborah Dunham
Susan Hagen
Gregory Koeller
Elizabeth Foulser

Flute

Jacqueline DeVoe
Kathleen Boyd

Oboe

Peggy Pearson
Barbara LaFitte

Clarinet

Bruce Creditor
Ian Greitzer

Bassoon

Thomas Stephenson
Margaret Phillips

Horn

Jean Rife
Neil DeLand
Richard Menaul
Kenneth Pope

Trumpet

Joseph Foley
Greg Whitaker
Vincent Monaco

Trombone

Don Davis
Nicholas Orovich
Mark Rohr

Harp

Judy Saiki Couture

Piano

Karen Harvey

Timpani

John Grimes

Percussion

Craig McNutt

Bruce Berg

*Emerson***Chorus****Soprano**

Luellen Best

Kathryn Carlson

Kumi Donaghue

Angelynne Hinson

Lili Kaufmann

Nancy Kurtz

Suzanne McAllister

Susan K. Navien

Hazel O'Donnell

Jaylyn Olivo

Gail Reitter

Karyl Ryczek

Mary Beth Stevens

Christine Swistro

Alto

Paula Dickerman

Kathleen Kew

Sheryl Krevsky

Deborah Cundey Owen

Catherine Radmer

Gloria Raymond

Diane Sokal

Lynn Torgove

Sara Wyse-Wenger

Majie Zeller

Tenor

Adam Ackerman

Thomas Best

Jonathan English

Carey Erdman

Christopher Fitzpatrick

Edward Hinson

Charles Husbands

Donald Lindsay

Peter A. Owens

Dwight E. Porter

Irl Smith

Bass

Brian Church
Mark Andrew Cleveland
Benjamin Cole
Jim Egede-Nissen
Eugene Gover
John Graef
Robert Henry
Charles Turner
Daryl Yoder
Doug Williams

Beth Pearson, cello
Deborah Dunham, bass

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Concerto for Double Brass Choir and Orchestra. Los Angeles Philharmonic, A. Previn conducting. New World Records 80395-2.
Concerto for Flute and Orchestra. R. Bowman, flute; Albany Symphony Orchestra, D. A. Miller conducting. Albany Records TROY 390.
Concerto for Viola and Orchestra. J. Laredo, viola; New Jersey Symphony Orchestra; H. Wolff conducting. New World Records 80404-2.
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. R. M. Harbison, violin; Emmanuel Music, C. Smith conducting. Koch 7310.
The Flight into Egypt. R. Anderson, soprano; S. Sylvan, baritone; The Cantata Singers & Ensemble, D. Hoose conducting. New World Records 80395-2.
Four Songs of Solitude. M. Makarski, violin. New World Records 80391-2.
Piano Quintet. G. Kalish, piano; Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Nonesuch 79189.
Sonata No.1 for Piano. R. Shannon. Bridge Records 9036.
String Quartet No. 3. The Lydian String Quartet. Musica Omnia mo0110.
Symphony No. 1. Boston Symphony Orchestra, S. Ozawa conducting. New World Records 80331-2.
Symphony No. 3. Albany Symphony Orchestra, D. A. Miller conducting. Albany Records TROY 390.

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FOUR PSALMS

THE CANTATA SINGERS & ENSEMBLE, DAVID HOOSE, CONDUCTOR
80613-2

Four Psalms (1999)

1. Prelude 7:05
2. Four Psalms 31:34

Majie Zeller, soprano; Lynn Torgove, mezzo-soprano; Frank Kelley, tenor; David Kravitz, baritone; The Cantata Singers & Ensemble; David Hoose, conductor

Emerson (1995)

3. Part I 5:40
4. Part II 6:41

The Cantata Singers; Beth Pearson, cello; Deborah Dunham, bass; David Hoose, conductor

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