

# Sacred Music at Notre Dame

Presents

## Concordia

Ritornello Ensemble

Fr. Jacob Meyer, *lector*

Howard Eckdahl, *conductor*

### *The Life and Lamentations of David*

Reading I: Behold, he keepeth the sheep

***Inveni David*** (1592)

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina  
(c.1525–1594)

Reading II: Thy servant will go

***Veritas Mea*** (1592)

Palestrina

Reading III: What can he have more, but the kingdom?

***Doleo super te from Considera Israel*** (c.1506)

Pierre de La Rue  
(c.1452–1518)

*The Eight*

Reading IV: A great name

***Diligam te, Domine*** (1591)

Hans Leo Hassler  
(1564–1612)

Reading V: The sword shall never depart from thine house

***Jehovah, quam multi sunt hostes mei***, Z. 135 (c.1678)

Henry Purcell  
(1659–1695)

Mark Laseter, *tenor*

Jared Swope, *baritone*

Ritornello Ensemble, *basso continuo*

Reading VI: Through the heart

***When David Heard*** (1999)

Eric Whitacre  
(b. 1970)

Reading VII: I go the way of all the earth

***The Last Words of David*** (1949)

Randall Thompson  
(1899–1984)

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Sunday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 | 4:00 PM | St. Monica Catholic Church, Mishawaka, Indiana

Howard Eckdahl is a student of Professor Carmen-Helena Téllez.

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of requirements of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.

## **Concordia**

Howard Eckdahl, *conductor*

Dr. Jung-hwa Lee, *collaborative pianist*

Dr. Carmen-Helena Téllez, *Professor of Record*

### **Soprano**

Emily Bird<sup>o</sup>

Katrina Keat

Jessica Roberts

Emily Swope<sup>o</sup>

Erin Wendt

### **Alto**

Fatima Anyekema<sup>o</sup>

Erin Donegan

Alyse Jamieson<sup>o</sup>

Kate Ragan

### **Tenor**

Nolan Carter<sup>o</sup>

James Goldrick

Brandon Hollihan

Mark Laseter<sup>o</sup>

Michael Prough

Josh Wang

### **Bass**

Stephen Drendall

Michael Hildreth

Zen Kuriyama

Constantine Novotny<sup>o</sup>

Ryan Peteraf

Jared Swope<sup>o</sup>

## **Ritornello Ensemble**

Dr. Rose Wollman, *coordinator*

### **Basso continuo**

Mary Anne Ballard, *viola da gamba*

Daniel Schwandt, *organ*

Jon Wasserman, *theorbo*

<sup>o</sup>Members of *The Eight*



## The Life and Lamentations of David

David is a monumental figure from the Old Testament. His saga is chronicled in the Books of Samuel, and the readings in this program that tell his story are compiled from the King James Version, with additional material taken from the first Book of Kings. The paraphrased narrative used here tells David's story concisely with some omission and condensing, adapts the old English language judiciously so it is understandable upon first reading, and maintains as much as possible of the artistic beauty in verse for which the King James Version is known.

Each reading precedes a piece of music that contains text that is either historically attributed to David or related to his narrative as it is told in this program. Naturally, some psalms fill the former category, and verses from Samuel as well. Of special note are three of David's lamentations, a body of content that has inspired many musical settings throughout history. Each one serves as a focal point; one from the Renaissance, one from the Baroque, and one from our time. All provide a glimpse into the emotions of a man whose influence and story is still relevant, as interpreted through the styles and contexts of the composers who put pen to paper to tell a story.

There was much to choose from when selecting music. David, a musician himself, has perpetually been at the center of inspiration for composers, especially those who contribute to the body of sacred choral music. The selections come from Catholic and Protestant traditions, with some blurring of lines, and two settings are twentieth-century concert pieces. Each offers an insight into the world as it was when the music was created, and tells a part of David's story through that lens.

Music from the Renaissance is at the core of this concert and one of the aims of this recital is to increase understanding of its performance. Professor Alexander Blachly graciously coached and counseled the performers to that end. The motets by Palestrina provided an avenue to solidify core practices; La Rue's motet offered a variance through the use of a smaller ensemble and an earlier polyphonic language – an edition was prepared to match the voicing available. (La Rue wrote for exceptionally low ranges). All of the motets are transposed for voicing reasons and sonic continuity in support of the programmatic narrative. Two pieces on the program, Hassler's *Diligam te, Domine* and Purcell's *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei* are examples with varied influences from the transition between the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Expressive affect, Italianate soli, and Baroque articulation come through in Purcell's work; but contrapuntal writing is still prevalent in both. Some uncertainty arose about the appropriate pitch level for an authentic performance of *Jehova*. In this case, with the absence of a definitive indication of original performance conditions, modern pitch is used for continuity in key structure. Whitacre's *When David Heard* required development and implementation of 'choral architecture,' a strategy to manage the demands of the score with a chamber choir.

Please enjoy this telling of David's story, which has captivated humanity for thousands of years with its tales of triumph, turmoil, passion and emotion, as heard through verses from the Old Testament and music born in fascinating contexts.

## Readings, Texts and Translations, Notes

### Reading I: *Behold, he keepeth the sheep*

And the Lord said unto Samuel, “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.”

And it came to pass, Samuel went and Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, “look not on countenance, or on the height of stature; because I have refused them: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

And Samuel said unto Jesse, “The Lord hath not chosen these. Are here all thy children?” And Jesse said, “There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep.” And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him: for this is he.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.



## ***Inveni David***

Psalm 88:20-21

Inveni David servum meum,  
oleo sancto meo unxi eum.  
Manus enim mea auxiliabitur ei  
et brachium meum confortabit eum.  
– Vulgate

I have found David my servant,  
with my holy oil I anointed him.  
With my hand shall he be established  
and mine arm shall strengthen him.  
– King James Version

### **Notes on *Inveni David* and *Veritas Mea***

**Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's** *Inveni David* and *Veritas Mea* are taken from his 1593 publication of offertories for the church year. This collection, along with earlier works contained therein, bears the fruit of his years revitalizing the music of St. Peter's in Rome as choirmaster of the Capella Giulia, the Basilica choir for non-papal services. His appointment there coincided with the implementation of the Tridentine Mass, a standardization of the Roman Rite (now known as the Extraordinary Form) spurred by concern that Protestant ideas of the time could infiltrate the liturgy. The Tridentine Mass afforded more freedom to develop liturgical music. The text clarity required by guidelines established by the Council of Trent (another reaction to the Protestant reformation) was relaxed somewhat in support of the evangelistic role of artistic music, and the resulting polyphony is considered among scholars to represent a pinnacle of Palestrina's later work.

*Inveni David* exquisitely expresses the moment David is revealed to Samuel and the Lord. This is represented musically through the opaque opening three notes of the moto on 'Inveni' ('I come upon') which then establishes the final of the mode on 'David,' coinciding with the entry of the second voice to create a moment of clarity. Throughout the motet Palestrina maintains a shroud of mystery, assisted by the darkness of the Phrygian mode as the polyphony unfolds, only clearing the texture to accentuate key aspects of the verse in this vivid prelude to David's saga. *Veritas Mea*, in contrary fashion, opens unambiguously on the opening words 'My truth.' Imagery features prominently for the final phrases of the motet; there is no doubt that the leap of a fifth in the moto on 'exultate' represents David's horn. Both motets exhibit the best characteristics of Palestrina's craft: a comprehensive understanding of counterpoint practices, innovative invention, and subtle but transparent of setting of the text.

## Reading II: *Thy servant will go*

The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul said unto his servants, "Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me." Then answered one of the servants, and said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him."

Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, "Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep." And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them. And there went a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, "Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me."

And David said unto Saul, "thy servant will go and fight with him. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

And Saul said unto David, "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.

David said to the Philistine, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.

### ***Veritas Mea***

Psalm 88:25

Veritas mea et misericordia  
mea cum ipso:  
et in nomine meo  
exaltabitur cornu ejus.

—Vulgate

But my faithfulness and my mercy  
shall be with him:  
and in my name  
shall his horn be exalted.

— King James Version

### **Reading III: *What can he have more, but the kingdom?***

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, and Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow. David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

And it came to pass when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, and said, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: what can he have more but the kingdom?" Saul eyed him from that day forward and was afraid of him.

Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, "Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself." And David abode in the wilderness, and saw that Saul was come out to seek his life. Jonathan arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, "Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul, my father, knoweth."

When Saul had returned from pursuing after David, the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain on mount Gilboa. Now it came to pass when David was returned that a man came with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth. And David said unto him, "From whence comest thou?"

And the man said unto him, "Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. The people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

And David said unto the young man that told him, "How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?" And the young man said, "As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me and said: 'Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me.' So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord."

*Doleo super te from Considera Israel*

2 Samuel 1:26-27

Doleo super te, frater mi Jonatha,  
decore nimis, et amabilis  
super amorem mulierum.  
Sicut mater amat unicum filium suum,  
ita ego te diligebam.

Quomodo ceciderunt robusti,  
et perierunt arma bellica?

– Vulgate

I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan:  
exceeding beautiful, and amiable to  
me above the love of women.  
As the mother loveth her only son,  
so did I love thee.

How are the valiant fallen,  
and the weapons of war perished?

– Douay-Rheims Challoner

**Notes on *Doleo super te***

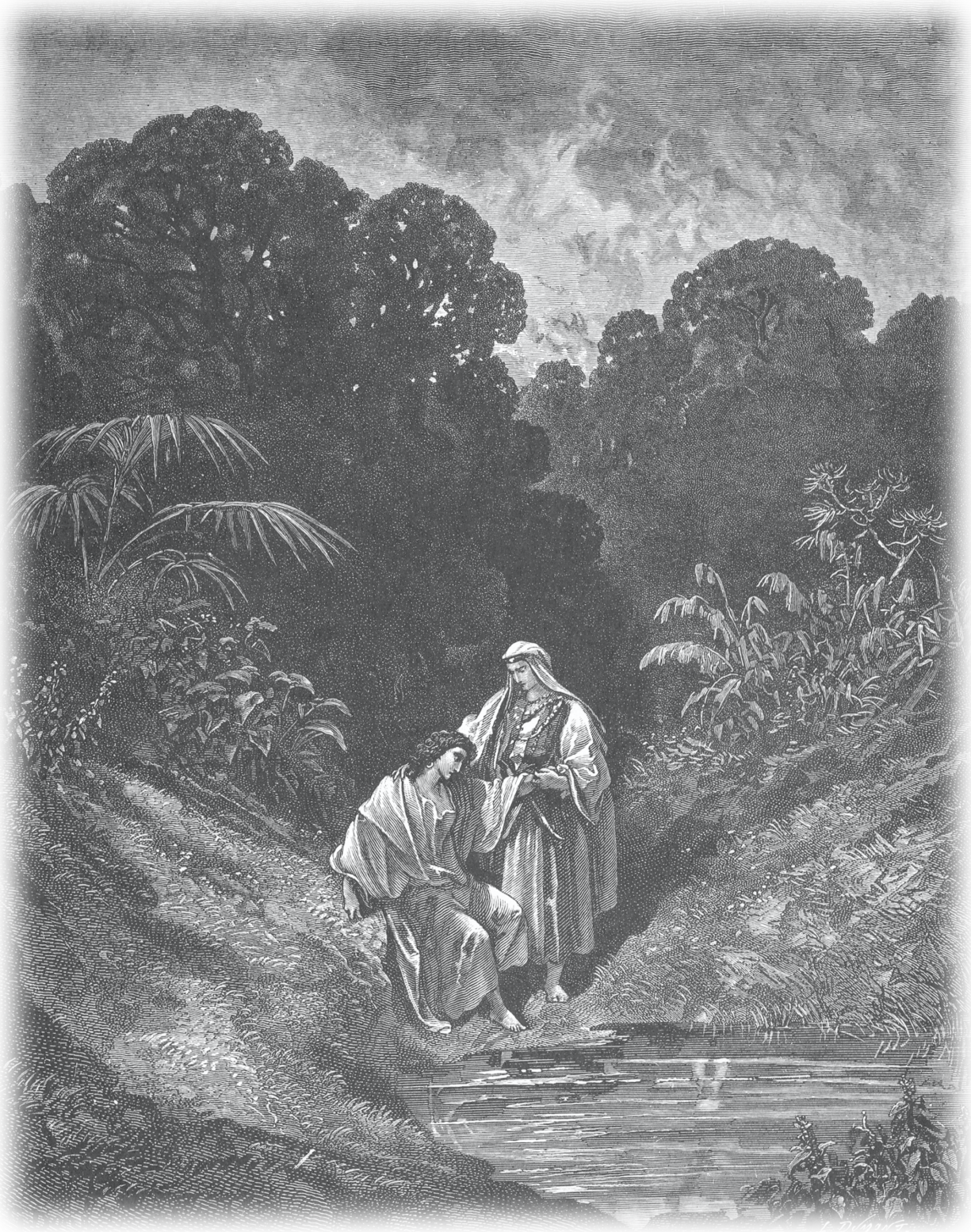
**Pierre de La Rue** was a Franco-Flemish composer who is considered to be one of the most important composers of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This year marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. While little is known about his early life, his prime years at the Hapsburg Burgundian court are documented with plentiful manuscripts and records; it is known that La Rue flourished in the rich cultural environment (the court was a musical center of the time), was well-travelled, and established a positive, enduring reputation. A manuscript of *Doleo te* from *Considera Israel* manifested in London, and a full copy of the motet came to Florence and Rome. The Florence manuscript dates from La Rue's lifetime and is considered authoritative; a critical edition of it is the source for the performance edition used today.

*Considera Israel* as a whole has been compared with Josquin's *Planxit autem David*, and while Josquin's influence on La Rue is well-known, peculiar similarities between the two settings of David's lament of Jonathan may suggest a one-sided rivalry on La Rue's part. Interestingly, another Davidian lament exhibits the closeness of the two composers: the well-known motet *Absalom fili mi* has fairly recently been re-attributed from Josquin to La Rue. Although definite authorship is still disputed, the matter certainly highlights the close relation of the two composers' music.

La Rue's composing of *Considera Israel* is suspected by some scholars to coincide with the sudden death of Prince Philip I of Castile, although that has not been deemed a certainty. If so, the somber piece was to console Margaret, the deceased's sister. The lament, taken from Samuel and the Book of Yashar before that, is one of the oldest and finest Hebrew poems. It dates from David's time and some scholars believe it is actually David's writing – an argument justified by the distinct emotional content. La Rue's sensitivity to the text, as shown here in the tender and exquisite *Doleo te*, is heightened relative to his other motets, and could be considered an indication of its suspected genesis as a consolation for his patroness.



*David and Jonathon*  
Gustav Doré





## Reading IV: *A great name*

Then came all the tribes of Israel to David and spake, saying, “Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.”

So David made a league with them before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

Thus saith the Lord: “I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever.”

### **Diligam te, Domine**

Psalm 18:1-2

Diligam te, Domine, fortitudo mea,  
Dominus, firmamentum meum,  
et refugium meum, et liberator meus.  
Deus meus, adjutor meus,  
et sperabo in eum.  
– Vulgate

I will love thee, O Lord, my strength:  
The Lord is my firmament,  
my refuge, and my deliverer.  
My God is my helper,  
and in him will I put my trust.  
– King James Version

### **Notes on *Diligam te, Domine***

**Hans Leo Hassler's** *Diligam te, domine* is the 10<sup>th</sup> motet of his collection *Cantiones sacrae*. Like the collection of offertories of Palestrina, this compilation is meant to serve as a liturgical complement for the entire year; of the 48 motets therein, most are psalm settings. *Cantiones sacrae* was published in 1591 (just a year before Palestrina's offertories) when Hassler was in Augsburg working as an organist to Octavian Fugger II, to whom the collection is dedicated. Although Hassler was Protestant these were certainly composed for the Catholic Church, which dominated his locale and employed him. Nevertheless, his prudent selection of texts allowed his music to be used in both Catholic and Protestant churches.



Hassler is known to have brought Italian style back to Germany. He studied in Venice during the 1580's, and was one of the first to implement Italian trends into a developing German Baroque style along with his Augsburg successors, Schütz and Praetorius. *Diligam te, Domine* opens with strict imitation between the four voices and shows modest baroque tendencies with moments of homophony, florid lines, and glimpses of sequences. Hassler's writing is generally reminiscent of Palestrina, however his care for the prevailing sonority that emanated from the polyphony is a clear difference that distinguishes his style and foreshadows Baroque practice.

### **Reading V: *The sword shall never depart from thine house***

It came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah?"

And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, "I am with child."

David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah." And Joab sent Uriah to David.

David said to Uriah, "Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet."

And Uriah said unto David, "The servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."

And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, saying, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die."

And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

David's anger was greatly kindled against the rich man; and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die."

And Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house."

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, "I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand."

And when she had made and brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her and said, "Come lie with me, my sister."

And she answered him, "Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly." Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

And Absalom her brother said unto her, "Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing."

So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, "Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him."

And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded.

Absalom fled. And, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him, and the conspiracy against David was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. And there came a messenger to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom."

And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."

### **Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei**

Psalm 3:1-8

Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei,  
quam multi insurgunt contra me.  
Quam multi dicunt de anima mea,  
non est ulla salus isti in Deo plane.  
At tu, Jehova, clypeus es circa me,  
gloria mea et extollens caput meum.  
Voce mea ad Jehovam clamanti,  
respondit mihi e monte sanctitatis  
suae maxime.

Lord, how many are mine enemies,  
how many rise up against me!  
Many there be which say of my soul,  
there is no help for him in God.  
But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me;  
my glory, and lifter of mine head.  
I cried unto the Lord with my voice,  
and he heard me out of his holy hill.

Ego cubui et dormivi, ego expergefeci  
me, quia Jehova sustentat me.  
Non timebo a myriadibus populi,  
quas circum disposuerint metatores  
contra me.  
Surge, Jehova, fac salvum me, Deus mi:  
qui percussisti omnes inimicos meos  
maxilliam, dentes im proborum  
confregisti.  
Jehova est salus, super populum tuum.  
Sit benedicta tua maxime.  
– Tremellius Translation

I laid down and slept; I awaked;  
for the Lord sustained me.  
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of  
people, that have surrounded and  
set themselves against me.  
Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God:  
thou hast smitten all mine enemies  
upon the cheek bone; thou hast  
broken the teeth of the ungodly.  
Salvation belongeth unto the Lord:  
thy blessing is upon thy people.  
– King James Version (adapted)

### Notes on *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei*

**Henry Purcell** lived much of his musical life in the church and in service of the English crown. Trained as a chorister in the Chapel Royal, he was retained as a keeper of instruments, and eventually promoted to composer for the violins. By his early twenties, he was organist at both the Chapel Royal and Westminster Abbey, the latter an appointment he held the rest of his life.

As a mode of composition in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the anthem, in its full, verse, and symphony variations, manifested myriad influences on English music, reflecting the political and religious turmoil that defined the century. *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei* exhibits continental musical tastes which had found a place in England following the restoration of Charles II (himself accustomed to them from his *Interregnum* exile in France and the Spanish Netherlands); most notably in the soli passages, which display an Italian Baroque style juxtaposed against the chorus sections which combine old polyphonic practices, syllabic text setting, and homophony, exhibiting Purcell's eclectic manner. His harmonic audacity is on conspicuous display alongside the stylistic variances and typical keen attention to text.

The text in Latin, rather than English, has left some questions as to where and why this verse anthem was performed, but it is possible that it was written for Queen Catherine's Catholic chapel or for the Catholic family of Purcell's wife. Around the time *Jehova* was composed (c.1678-1780), a false suspicion of a "Popish Plot" to assassinate the protestant King Charles was embroiling crown and country in anti-Catholic madness. Purcell was well-placed near Charles during the political unrest; scholar Jonathon Keates posits that David represents Charles in *Jehova*, a fascinating insight on the genesis and inspiration of this setting of Psalm 3, in which David is encircled by enemies. *Jehova* is a convergence of musical and situational influences propelled by Purcell's genius into a dramatic rendering of the psalm and the underlying political troubles.

## Reading VI: *Through the heart*

David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. The king commanded Joab, saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.”

So the people went out into the field against Israel: And Absalom fought the servants of David. Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak. Joab took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive.

And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. Then said Joab to Cush, “Go tell the king what thou hast seen.”

And, behold, Cush came; and Cush said, “Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.”

And the king said unto Cush, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

And Cush answered, “The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.”

### When David Heard

2 Samuel 18:33

When David heard that Absalom was Slain,

he went up into his chamber over the gate and wept.

And thus he said: My Son, my son, O Absalom, my son Absalom!

Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

– King James Version (adapted)

### Notes on *When David Heard*

**Eric Whitacre's** *When David Heard* was written for the Brigham Young University Singers under the auspices of a Barlow Commission. The director of the BYU Singers, Ronald Staheli, was an early champion of Whitacre's music and maintains a close relationship with the composer, which yielded an important benchmark recording of Whitacre's choral works in 2002.

In 1998, three weeks after initially commissioning Whitacre, Staheli's son died in a car accident. Whitacre, in response, produced this setting of David's reaction to hearing news of his son, Absalom, being slain. A deeply personal piece written for his friend and collaborator, *When David Heard* is a musical distillation of grief. It is through this context one can understand the composition. The authenticity of the piece must be understood to access the immense emotional content. Understanding

the context reveals the truthfulness that drives the gestures Whitacre uses to convey grief; several of which could otherwise be considered awkward and quixotic.

The setting is bookended by choral recitatives of the narration from the verse. They feature the added-note sonorities for which Whitacre is widely known (and by some, dismissed). When David's own words become the focus, Whitacre builds a portrait of grief that is driven by ostinati, free counterpoint, unsettling polyrhythm and disregard for singing ease. It demands virtuosic accuracy from the singers in service of the texture, which provides vignettes of sobs, wailing, despondency – roars and utterances of grief. From Whitacre's previous collaboration with Staheli, he became more aware of the effectiveness of absence of sound; *When David Heard* finds some of its most striking rhetoric through motivic treatment of silence. The emotional turmoil waxes and wanes, culminating in a massive crescendo on a tone cluster spanning more than two octaves. David's exclamation bursts forth: "O, my son, O Absalom my son!" But it is not only David's grief that is heard. This piece generates an utterly brutal image of human grief that transcends its scriptural text.

### **Reading VII: *I go the way of all the earth***

Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore; keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest."

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue:"

### **The Last Words of David**

Second Samuel 23:3-4

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

And he shall be as the light of the morning,

when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds;

as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

– King James Version

**(notes over)**

## Notes on *The Last Words of David*

**Randall Thompson's** *The Last Words of David* was written quickly in the summer of 1949 for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It made its premiere in Lenox, Massachusetts, sung by the Berkshire Chorus (now known as the Tanglewood Chorus), comprised of students of the festival, with the BSO under Serge Koussevitzky. The piece was part of a celebration of Koussevitzky's 25<sup>th</sup> year of directorship of the BSO. Thompson, who also wrote his famous *Alleluia* for Tanglewood in a matter of days, writes the following about the hasty commission:

I have found it useful not only to search carefully for texts, but also to keep a file of poems of prose that might someday come in handy. My files have stood me in good stead. Years before I set it to music, I happened on the text of "The Last Words of David" in a Gideon Bible in a hotel room. When subsequently Koussevitzky asked me – at the point of a gun – to write a short choral piece for a documentary film on Tanglewood, I had the text in hand – and the gun never went off."

Thompson's legacy is tied not only to his choral music, but also to his long career as an educator. He taught at Wellesley, UC Berkeley, Virginia, Princeton, Curtis, and Harvard; Leonard Bernstein was his student at both of the latter two. Though Thompson had strong ties to 'elite' circles in music, one of his greatest contributions to education and choral culture was his report *College Music* (1935) and the accompanying advocacy for a liberal arts approach to music education – a model that continues to thrive today – which is manifested in Thompson's accessible music. Critics detract from his legacy due to his amateur-friendly writing – a shallow understanding of an intentional, master design that transcends his works in service of choral art and culture, which thrived during his years of influence.

Many aspects of Thompson's style are displayed in *The Last Words of David*: his dramatic sense, here through use of mediant, borrowed-chord and modal progressions, well-constructed vocal lines that support easy heroics from the singers in service of the musical drama, and the expected roots in Renaissance polyphony, on display in the closing 'alleluia.' Supporting all facets is the piano accompaniment, so effective that it suggests the orchestration is an adaptation thereof, rather than it being a reduction of the orchestra.

The words are important, and aptly chosen purely based on the situation surrounding the commission: Koussevitzky was at the end of his tenure with the Boston Symphony, and was certainly a 'king.' And, perhaps, there was a bit of subtext transmitted through the verse selected for a commission requested "at the point of a gun." Nevertheless, the wisdom imparted is timeless: *He that ruleth over men must be just.*

**Thank you for attending**  
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My father: DAVID, my mother

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