

PRAISE THE LORD (Psalm 150) by David Avshalomov

This work was commissioned by the choir of Westwood United Methodist Church of Los Angeles to recognize and honor Director of Music Ministries Dr. Gina Shaw on the occasion of her retirement in 2008. It was dedicated by them to the Glory of God (Soli Deo Gloria).

ABOUT THE MUSIC

This setting of Psalm 150, the culminating Psalm in the Old Testament, draws its energy from the root meaning of the word *hallelujah* used regularly in the Psalms. It is the Hebrew word used for requesting a congregation to join in praise. The best translation of *hallelujah* is "Praise Yah, you people", usually worded in English versions as "Praise ye the LORD" or "Praise the LORD" (the refrain repeated in this English-only setting). However, *hallelujah* means more, as the word *hallel* in Hebrew means a joyous praise, to boast of God, or *to act madly or foolishly*. Hence, the purpose of Psalm 150 as I see it, and of my setting, is for an already ecstatic chorus to incite the congregation to mad, wild praising of the Lord.

Thus the work is a wild, slightly modern, fast, rhythmic setting. Two musical features characterize the music: First, The two basic ways of "feeling" a lively 5/8 meter: 3_2 ("Praise the Lord") and 2_3 ("Praise Him___"), beaten and felt one-to-the-bar, over a flow of continuous eighth notes (in the organ). The syllabic placement in the piece continually uses these two rhythmic building blocks naturally. Second, a modified Lydian mode with a lowered 7th degree. (On C this is C D E F# G A Bb.) The whole-tone tetrachord and the prominent tritone from 1 to 4 flavor much of the melodic material, in various keys—but not all the harmonies.

This psalm text lists references to various different kinds of music or instruments for praise; every setting of this text throughout history has had a go at depicting them, this one no exception. So there is vocal imitation of the harp and lyre in that verse, and of vocal drums (like tabla or derboukah) in the verse on the timbrel and the dance. The organ part covers many of the other instruments, and in the middle on "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet" indulges in a fanfare using the brash *Trompette en Chamade* stop (the horizontal rank pointing straight out into the sanctuary) or as loud a trumpet/brass stop as available. For "Praise Him with the sound the sound of the organ" there is an extended "Bulgarian Jazz" organ solo using a rich, fruity mixture. In the next section there is an optional suspended cymbal part. (There are alternate vocal effect cues in the choral parts, plus organ sounds, to cover it.)

The chorus, beyond expressing the various ways of praising, also have several manic sections repeating "Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord." Floaty music outlines "Let ev'rything that hath breath praise the lord," which suddenly jumps back to a last compressed hortatory "Praise" repetition section overlapping the men and women in harmony and then breaks off suddenly, followed by a final broad statement which, with the re-entering organ line, rises to a big bright ending.