

PRINCIPLES by David Avshalomov

(Brief note by the composer)

This work was inspired by my first encounter with Jefferson's personal Creed, chiseled high on the stone wall inside his Memorial in Washington, D.C., during cherry blossom time in 1970. It stunned me like a lighting bolt. Other texts there intrigued me as well, given my lifelong concern with social justice. I soon sketched settings for some of those ringing phrases, laying out structural ideas for a work for male voices and band (I was serving in the USAF Singing Sergeants). The sketches then sat in my sketchbook for over two decades.

In 1993, the 25th reunion of the Singing Sergeants was announced; I offered them a new work based on my Jefferson sketches; they were interested and reviewed an initial sample. A performance at that event did not materialize, but I was already on fire writing and couldn't stop. Some research had provided further texts, culminating in the amazing *Statute of Virginia for religious freedom*, a document for our time, which sets the tone for the whole work.

Musically, the piece is a hybrid; it draws on the old formal conventions of oratorio, with choral sections, solo voice, interludes, more choral passages, recitative, and so on. But it is dramatic in emotional range, and stylistically rooted in mid-20th-century, in the neo-tonal vein. The form was delineated by my choices of text, and the text was a challenge to set. Jefferson's prose uses the long, earnest cadence of the Enlightenment, with formal rhetorical flourishes and extended series of clauses. To get a manageable "libretto," I made frequent ellipses—without altering meanings or inflections. Although many of his formulations spoke directly to me, few evoked lyricism. My response was to develop a hortatory, structured singing rhetoric to match the logic, rhythm, and structure of the ideas; I managed to eke out some lyric moments as well.

The principles set to music here are not worn out, nor are they merely empty rhetoric (remember Tian an Men square). We have scarcely begun to realize the potential that lies behind Jefferson's optimistic view in his last days, that "All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of Man." I simply hope that my music will help to "refresh our recollection of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them."

The text sources, in order of setting, are:

His personal Creed

Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, 1779/86

Letter, London, 1787, in reference to Shay's Rebellion

His personal Motto

Declaration of Independence, 1776

His self-penned Epitaph

His last letter, June 24, 1826, declining an invitation to the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, due to his failing health. [He died July 4, 1826]

David Avshalomov, December, 1996